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The Unkindest Cut: The Decision to Withhold I Corps from the Peninsula Campaign, 1862

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THE UNKINDEST CUT:
THE DECISION TO WITHHOLD I CORPS
FROM THE PENINSULA CAMPAIGN, 1862

A Thesis

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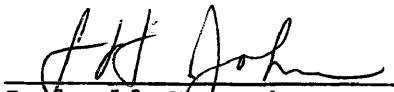
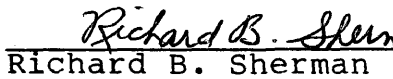


Ludwell H. Johnson III



Richard B. Sherman

H. Cam Walker

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ABSTRACT

The Peninsula Campaign of George McClellan has long been a subject of controversy, but most of the discussion has centered around the discrepancy between the General's grandiose plans for ending the war in one fell swoop and the actuality of his excruciatingly slow movement, his reluctance to attack, and his perennial and petulant demands for reinforcements so as to carry out his plans. In particular, he was outraged that, at the outset of his campaign, an entire corps--the one intended to perform a flanking maneuver necessary for a rapid advance--was withheld from his operating army and retained for the defense of Washington.

McClellan insisted that he had made adequate provisions and left sufficient troops for the security of the capital; therefore, this decision could not have been made for military reasons and must have been prompted by a politically-motivated conspiracy to deny him and his Army the triumph of ending the war. His civilian superiors countered that he had engaged in creative bookkeeping when he outlined the forces left in Northern Virginia, and they were entirely justified in retaining I Corps.

This issue turns on the question of the two accountings of troops in and around Washington. But it also requires inquiry into the peculiar nature of the politico-military structure of the Federal government at the beginning of the Civil War. This thesis examines these conditions in an attempt to determine whether or not the decision to withhold I Corps was based in military necessity.

THE UNKINDEST CUT:

THE DECISION TO WITHHOLD I CORPS

FROM THE PENINSULA CAMPAIGN, 1862

INTRODUCTION

> There is no stir or walking in the streets,
> And the complexion of the element
> In favour's like the work we have in hand,
> Most bloody, fiery, and most terrible.
> Julius Caesar, Act I, Scene iii

If the story of George B. McClellan and his plans for a brilliant campaign on the Virginia peninsula in 1862 were to be staged, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar would be a likely vehicle. The setting and cast of characters for the two dramas are remarkably similar; and many of the same emotions are roiling about both stages (Roman/Elizabethan and Industrial Age American). The end of republican Rome and beginning of Republican America were eras of high passions, when politicians and generals strove to vanquish one another and shape the world to their ends.

McClellan himself, beginning with his accession to the command of the Division of the Potomac, and continuing to this day, has been accused of bestriding the narrow world like a Colossus. Those charges are certainly not without basis in fact: the Young Napoleon was arrogant and overweening. He was adored--even venerated--by the Army he created. The Potomac could easily have become his Rubicon.

Like Caesar, at times he held himself above the civilians who crippled his plans and fettered his ambitions.

And there was no lack of petty men who scorned to peep about to find themselves dishonorable graves: other ambitious generals, and, of course, Radical Republicans, who did not deem themselves underlings to such as McClellan. In Edwin M. Stanton one recognizes yon metaphorically lean and hungry Cassius (whom even the self-besotted Caesar knew should be watched). Benjamin F. Wade emulated envious Casca, and Irvin McDowell would make a serviceable Brutus. There is no Antony, but with Abraham Lincoln waiting in the wings as Octavian, the drama of the Peninsula Campaign yet reads much like the first three acts of the Bard's tragedy.

McClellan himself no doubt would have preferred to be cast as the warrior-king of Henry V, Prince Hal grown up into his heroic destiny. But that would have been before the Spring of 1862, when he found his command undermined. Then he would have recognized the parallels between his role and that of Julius. The finale of the nineteenth century drama would differ from the Bard's: in the end, the latter-day Republican ideologues triumphed, not only over their feared Caesar but over the incipient Augustus as well. But the General was nonetheless undone: as he took to the field to crush the Confederate Army in Virginia and win the accolades of the nation, an entire corps on which he had counted was detached from his operating force on the grounds

that the city of Washington must before all else be unassailable. McClellan felt that, like Caesar, he had been cut down brutally just when he was reaching for his greatest (and best-deserved) triumph.

There were other blows--at the same time McClellan was stripped of overall command and even lost control over his theatre of operations; recruiting was halted just as he took to the field; naval support on which he had counted was not forthcoming. But indubitably the unkindest cut of all to his mind was the withholding of I Corps, basely and treacherously removed by an erstwhile friend and supporter for purely political reasons. Stanton claimed that the troops were necessary for the security of Washington, which had been left defenseless by McClellan, a charge that outraged the General. He had assuredly made adequate provisions for the safety of the capital. Therefore the sabotaging of his plans for the campaign that would end the war had to be a foul conspiracy to destroy him for purely political reasons. The issue turns on whether the General in fact left Washington "entirely secure" before leaving for the Peninsula.

CHAPTER ONE
DOGS OF WAR

> Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds
> In ranks and squadrons and right form of war
> Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol.
> II,i

In many ways, the advent of the first Republican Administration was as tumultuous as the final days of Republican Rome. In less than a decade, the new political party had coalesced and wrested control of the national government from the previously dominant Democrats. In the election of 1860 it was abetted in this by the Democrats, who split their vote among three candidates representing southern, northern and union interests. That fall Abraham Lincoln was elected President on a platform that included opposition to the extension of slavery and protective tariffs for northern industry. Almost immediately, southern states began seceding from the Union.

Republicans were more or less opposed to slavery (on a variety of moral and economic grounds) and felt it necessary to root out the entrenched power of the slaveocracy in order

to establish complete political control over the growing nation.[1]

Members of the Radical wing were combative, righteous and vindictive men with a passionate hatred for slavery and its political representatives. Even more revolutionary were the abolitionists, who often pushed the Radicals further than they might otherwise go. Radical leaders elected to the Senate were Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio, Zachariah Chandler of Michigan and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts; Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania led their forces in the House.[2]

The Radical agenda called for Slave Power to be obliterated, so these men were convinced that a short war to restore the union might end too quickly to destroy slavery and its attendant political power, impeding economic change. For this reason, they were suspicious of all Democrats and even non-Radical Republicans, who did not share their fervor. As the nation mobilized and controversy grew around war aims, Radicals also had visions of a Democratic politico-military conspiracy to prevent the complete subjugation of the South. Their worst nightmare was that a military dictatorship would grow in an Army commanded by West Point-trained Democratic-inclined generals. Therefore,

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[1]T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 4-5, 7.

[2]Ibid., 5-8.

control of military patronage would become a crucial element in the Radical scheme.[3]

Moderates hoped for a gradual end to slavery and favored a compensated emancipation and the colonization for the freed blacks. They distrusted the fanaticism of their Radical counterparts, who were characterized by Lincoln's secretary John Hay as "Jacobins." As a Moderate, Lincoln held the restoration of the Union to be paramount--above party considerations and certainly above emancipation of the slaves, which he believed (at least initially) was incidental to war aims.[4] But he was the head of a rather precarious coalition government composed of war Democrats, old Whigs, miscellaneous southern Unionists and various wings of his own party; he had a job of work to keep them all functioning together. This diversity was reflected in his own cabinet, whose dominant members were Secretary of State William H. Seward, Secretary of War Simon Cameron, and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase.[5] To a lesser extent, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, Attorney

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[3]Ibid., 10-26, passim.

[4]Ibid., 5, 10.

[5]Cameron resigned to become Ambassador to Russia in January, 1862, and was replaced by Edwin M. Stanton, who is discussed later.

General Edward Bates, and Postmaster General Montgomery Blair also shaped policy.[6]

Seward, former Governor of and Senator from New York, had been Lincoln's chief competition at the Chicago convention in the summer of 1860.[7] He was not a Radical, but Chase, his rival, was. The two men actively disliked one another, and it was a very delicate and diplomatic dance indeed that Lincoln performed to bring them both into his cabinet. Noted Welles of the function of the two rivals in the cabinet, "Seward comforts him [Lincoln]--Chase he deems a necessity."[8] Chase's overriding motivation was "unappeasable ambition for official power and distinction," Welles wrote; his sole aim throughout his term in the cabinet was to build a power base of support for another bid for the presidency in 1864.[9] A Radical mole in the cabinet, he was influential in the appointment of many high-ranking

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[6]Hannibal Hamlin as Vice-President and Caleb B. Smith as Secretary of the Interior are of little interest to this story except to note that they were chosen largely as concessions to the Republican interests in their respective states, Maine and Indiana.

[7]Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln, vol 2, The War Years (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1963), 42.

[8]Thomas G. and Marva R. Belden, So Fell the Angels (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1956), 73.

[9]Gideon Welles, Selected Essays by Gideon Welles, vol 2, Lincoln's Administration, ed. Albert Mordell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1960), 36; Alexander McClure, Lincoln and Men of War-Times, ed. J. Stuart Torrey (Philadelphia: Rolley and Reynolds, Inc., 1962), 129-30.

officers, including Irvin McDowell as commander of the Division of the Potomac.[10] Cameron, a Republican leader from Pennsylvania and part of the Radical clique, was in the cabinet as the result of a political deal, pure and simple: it had been the release of his delegates at the 1860 convention that had begun the stampede for Lincoln.[11] Cameron's ineptitude eventually forced Lincoln to replace him with Edwin M. Stanton.

Bates, former Attorney General of Missouri, had also been a state senator and U.S. Congressman. Welles, a Jacksonian Democrat from Connecticut, had studied law, but had achieved his influence as a newspaper editor. Blair was the only West Point graduate in the cabinet. He had served as counsel for Dred Scott before the Supreme Court and helped find a lawyer to defend John Brown.[12]

All these were men of strong opinions and ambitions; it was frequently a fractious group, and Lincoln was often hard put to balance their diverging interests. Further, neither the President nor his cabinet had any experience with the administering of a national government. And, in the midst

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[10]Frederick J. Blue, Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State Press, 1987), 173-74. After the advent of Stanton to the War Department, Chase was excluded from military decisions, which were thereupon made solely by Lincoln and Stanton. Ibid., 175.

[11]Sandburg, War Years, 2:44-45.

[12]Burton J. Hendrick, Lincoln's War Cabinet (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1946), 296.

of a war crisis, they were "innocent of military abilities," in the words of the Navy Secretary.[13]

If the Lincoln Administration was unsettled, the condition of the army was hardly any better at the outset of the war. The American tradition opposing a military establishment had limited the regular army in 1860 to about 16,000 professional soldiers stationed largely in the West. It was further weakened by the resignation of many gifted leaders, who "went South" as their native states seceded, leaving about 13,000 troops. Many military commanders lacked practical knowledge of warfare, and "military differences and army jealousies existed from the beginning, which were aggravated and stimulated by partisan friends and opponents of rival officers, and by dissent from the policy pursued in the conduct of military affairs to which many took exception."[14]

At the beginning, command structure was nebulous. The President was, of course, the Commander-in-Chief, but he traditionally did not make military decisions. He was to set policy and advise on the execution of policy. The War Secretary's role was amorphous, tending to grow or shrink in power depending on the individual holding it. Cameron hardly affected army commanders; Stanton would be a force to

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[13]Welles, Lincoln's Administration, 69-70.

[14]Ibid., 57.

be reckoned with. The General-in-Chief formulated plans for the army; the President and cabinet approved them. The Navy Secretary (or Assistant Secretary) made naval plans. There was no requirement for cabinet officers to coordinate operations with each other or with the Commanding General. Beyond these, there were special appointed boards and committees to deal with military objectives. In effect, "Washington swarmed with amateur Napoleons."[16]

Morever, there was no central control within the army itself. There were seven bureau chiefs, who were not responsible to the General-in-Chief, but reported directly to the Secretary of War. Under Cameron, they operated more like satraps than as integrated elements in a military command. Later, under Stanton, they were to become more coordinated, but they never achieved real efficiency.[17]

By June of 1861, field armies had grown to 30,000 (and would expand further as the war went on); no one in the military had had any experience with forces that large. There was no general staff, no staff schools and little

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[16]Rowena Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1978), xiii-xiv.

[17]Russell F. Weigley, Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M.C. Meigs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 217. The chiefs were Adjutant General, Commissary General, Surgeon General, Paymaster General, Chief of Engineers, Chief of Ordnance, and Quartermaster General.

military literature to help bridge the knowledge gap.[18] Officers who had served in the Mexican War twenty years earlier had been subalterns then. Only such relics as General-in-Chief Winfield Scott or Ethan Allen Hitchcock had held command roles in 1846; and now they were too old to take the field. British war correspondent William Howard Russell summarized, "It is a commentary full of instruction on the military system of the Americans that they have not a soldier who has ever handled a brigade in the field fit for service in the North."[19]

Politics was deeply embedded in the structure of the Union forces. The vast bulk of the massive armies that were to be raised were organized in units of volunteers. These men elected their officers; "charlatans, incompetents and demagogues were put into the most responsible places . . . untold harm was done both to the morals and efficiency of the army." Further up the chain of command there was no hierarchy of rank and authority. A major general could command anything from a division to an army; this situation

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[18]Ibid., 165.

[19]23 July 1861, William Howard Russell, My Diary North and South, ed. Eugene H. Berwanger (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 218.

led to jealousy and insistence on seniority of appointment, which further disrupted the prosecution of the war.[20]

The Commander-in-Chief himself had no military expertise. In 1832, he had volunteered in the campaign against Black Hawk, serving a total of eighty days in the militia.[21] This experience may have predisposed him toward the idea of the citizen-soldier and the volunteer army. He also saw no difficulty in making command appointments for political reasons. It was a way to unite diverse groups in the war effort and minimize dissidence.[22] But some of these commissions cost him--and the country--dearly. Early on he appointed to major generalcies Nathaniel P. Banks (Republican) and Benjamin F. Butler (Democrat) of Massachusetts, and John C. Frémont, the 1856 Republican presidential candidate. Brigadier Generals David Hunter, Edwin V. Sumner and John Pope were also "entitled" to commands by virtue of their political clout. These appointments were dreadful mistakes, which early in his administration may be attributed to Lincoln's fumbling to take control of all elements of government--including

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[20]William S. Myers, A Study in Personality: General George Brinton McClellan (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1934), 168-69.

[21]Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln, vol. 1, The Prairie Years (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1960), 61.

[22]T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and his Generals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 10.

patronage.

As for overall war aims and grand strategy, these were elements that never came together, at least for the first two years of the war. Commanding General Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan called for securing the Mississippi River, isolating the Confederacy from outside commerce or assistance, then waiting for Unionists to come to power in the South. He saw no reason to invade. In fact, he imagined that such an action would alienate the southern Unionists of whom he expected so much, and he believed the North could win the war without an invasion.[23]

Lincoln's original strategy differed only on one or two points: he intended to hold Fortress Monroe, blockade Confederate ports, attack Charleston, and secure Washington, D.C.[24] These last two aims are interesting inasmuch as the former was motivated more by retribution against the city that supposedly began the war than by military necessity, and the latter was the barb that snagged McClellan's Peninsula plans. Capturing Charleston had marginal military value, but it would be a coup for northern morale. That Lincoln would consider this a basic requirement of Union

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[23]Scott to McClellan, 3 May 1861, U.S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, vol 51, pt. 1:369-70. Hereinafter referred to as OR. Unless otherwise noted, all references are to Series 1.

[24]Williams, Lincoln and his Generals, 16.

strategy indicates he was aware of the psychological aspect of fighting a war and gave it high priority. That he also made Washington's security a strategic necessity shows that he was unsure of its safety to begin with and deemed its protection to be doubly important. Its loss, even the threat of its loss would be a humiliation for the new government and could lead to the recognition and support of the Confederacy by European powers. Not only must Washington be safe, it must be seen to be safe.

And, in the early days after Fort Sumter, the city's security was indeed doubtful. Maryland was a slave state and might well have seceded with Virginia, cutting off communications and surrounding Washington with enemy territory. Troops marching through Baltimore on their way to the capital were fired upon, and order was only restored through martial law. Rebels occupied the high ground across the Potomac River at Arlington Heights. Artillery technology had given them a range of three to four miles, and they were only two miles from Federal executive offices and government buildings.[25] There were rumors of a planned attack on the city.[26]

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[25]Margaret Leech, Reveille in Washington (New York & London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), 99.

[26]20 April 1861, John Hay, Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay, ed. Tyler Dennett (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1939), 5.

Regular forces in the District were nominal--"little more than the usual number of dottery old bureau chiefs, and a sprinkling of gold-laced officers from the Navy Yard."[27] Although Scott insisted he was not worried about the safety of the city, Times correspondent Russell noted that there were only seven or eight hundred regulars and two field batteries commanded by officers of dubious loyalty to protect it and the Navy Yard. The Yard's commander himself was "openly accused of treasonable sympathies."[28] Russell toured Fort Washington on the Potomac, finding it neglected.

> Twenty determined men, armed with revolvers, could have taken the whole work. Afterwards, when I ventured to make a remark to General Scott as to the carelessness of the garrison, he said, "A few weeks ago it might have been taken by a bottle of whiskey. The whole garrison consisted of an old Irish pensioner."[29]

But forces gathered and by late June, public pressure was mounting for some sort of advance against the Rebels. On the 25th, Lincoln met with his cabinet and high-ranking military men, who advised against precipitous action. But Lincoln and his cabinet, as "political experts" overruled the generals: "public sentiment would not admit of such a

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[27]B. Franklin Cooling, III, "Civil War Deterrent: Defenses of Washington," in Editors of Military Affairs, Military Analysis of the Civil War (Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1977), 43.

[28]6 April 1861, Russell, Diary, 63.

[29]2 April 1861, Ibid., 57-58.

delay."[30] With newspapers running banner headlines urging "Onward to Richmond!" the army must move.

In July, it finally did. But it was stopped by Beauregard's forces at a small creek near Manassas Junction. In a bizarre encounter observed by picnicking Washingtonians, McDowell's green troops broke and ran. The routed Division of the Potomac scrambled frantically back to Washington (some soldiers hardly pausing there on their way home); McDowell was in disgrace. Radical Congressmen who had watched the battle returned to the capital convinced that the loss had been the result of military incompetence, and that they knew more than professional officers about successful campaigning.[31] From this moment on, they intended to supervise the military as well as ideological management of the war.

Lincoln's anxiety to fight had not been entirely a consequence of public pressure. He feared that a long war would reshape the Union and believed that a quick end would preserve the status quo ante bellum.[32] Now he had a

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[30]Weigley, 169-70; Eugene C. Drozdowski, "Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War: Toward Victory" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1964), 406.

[31]Hans L. Trefousse, The Radical Republicans, Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 173-74.

[32]Joseph L. Harsh, ""George Brinton McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative: An Introduction to the Conservative Strategy in the Civil War: April-August, 1861" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 1970), 95-98. Harsh concludes that it was Lincoln's eagerness to fight that resulted in Bull

disorganized rabble for the defense of the capital. He needed someone who could bring order to the Potomac and hope to the North. He called on George B. McClellan, whose victory in a minor skirmish in Western Virginia had been the only bright spot in a dark spring and summer.

Run, not the Radicals' pressure. Ibid., 103.

CHAPTER TWO
BESTRIDING THE WORLD

> But I am constant as the northern star.
> Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
> There is no fellow in the firmament.
> III, i

When the war broke out, McClellan had left his comfortable position as superintendent of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad to volunteer his services for his native state of Pennsylvania. As a matter of fact, the governors of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York all wanted to commission the 34-year-old who had had a spotless army career after graduating first in his class at West Point.[1] But William Dennison of Ohio was first on the scene, and McClellan accepted a major generalcy of three-month volunteers.[2] Within a month, he was a Major General in the Regular Army, commanding the Department of the Ohio; only Winfield Scott was his superior.

His success in minor actions made him seem the logical choice to command what was left of the Division of the

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[1]Stephen W. Sears, George B. McClellan, The Young Napoleon (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), 68-69.

[2]Clarence E. MacCartney, Lincoln and his Generals (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 69-70.

Potomac, but there were also political reasons for this military decision: needing a broad base of support, Lincoln tried to appoint notable Democrats to visible positions, and McClellan was an important Democrat of state's rights beliefs.[3] Without consulting Scott, on 22 July, the day after the Union rout at Manassas, the President ordered McClellan to report to Washington and take command of the army there.[4] It was a prestigious post, especially for one so young, and he set out to replicate his organizational and campaign success of the West.

The General had a plan. On 2 August he sent the President a memorandum outlining his strategy for defeating the South and restoring the Union. Beginning grandly, he informed the Commander-in-Chief that in order to "crush a population sufficiently numerous, intelligent and warlike to constitute a nation," the Federals would have to display an overwhelming strength. He therefore called for an operating army of 273,000 men, with a defense force for the capital of less than 40,000 men (10,000 to protect the B & O Railroad and Potomac River, 5,000 to garrison Baltimore, 3,000 at Fort Monroe, and 20,000 "at the utmost" for Washington).[5]

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[3]Lewis B. Mayhew, "George B. McClellan Reevaluated" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State College, 1952), 77.

[4]Ibid., 183.

[5]McClellan to Lincoln, 2 August 1861, Papers of George B. McClellan, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. This memo is listed in his Report as 4 August; but in McClellan's Own Story he corrects the date. George B.

McClellan's strategy was based on several interlocking assumptions: the South would make every effort to remain independent, and its military capacity was to be respected; hard fighting would be necessary. Therefore, there must be full-scale offensive operations and larger numbers both tactically and strategically than the Confederates'; thus the North must put a total effort into fielding large, well-equipped, trained armies. More than victories would be necessary--the South's entire military establishment must be crushed. Therefore, the ultimate victory was more important than the immediate one. And, finally, since the main guideline for northern operations was reasonable certitude of success, no hammer-and-anvil operations or premature advances would be contemplated.[6]

McClellan wanted the nation's military resources concentrated under his command in the Virginia theatre. Toward that end, on 20 August, the Army of the Potomac was created by his general order, over Scott's objections. It included the two departments originally part of his command (Northeastern Virginia, and Washington and its vicinity on

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McClellan, Report on the Organization of the Army of the Potomac, to which Is Added an Account of the Campaign in Western Virginia (New York: Sheldon, 1864), 40-41; Idem, McClellan's Own Story: The War for the Union, The Soldiers who Fought It, The Civilians who Directed it, and his Relations to it and to them (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1887), 101-105.

[6]Harsh, "Forgotten Alternative," 195-206.

the Maryland side) as well as the troops in the Shenandoah Valley, all of Maryland and Delaware.[7] While Scott felt the Mississippi River Valley was crucial to the defeat of the South, McClellan thought Virginia the most important theatre. He agreed that Union strategy should include operations in the western river valleys, as well as coastal expeditions, but he believed that the decisive battles would be fought in Virginia, under his command. Following his victory there, he intended to lead his army to New Orleans, where he would mop up whatever was left of Rebel resistance.[8] But the first step would be to shape up his Army and build defenses for the capital.

In public testimony McClellan noted that when he arrived in Washington in July of 1861, "I found a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. The defenses of Washington

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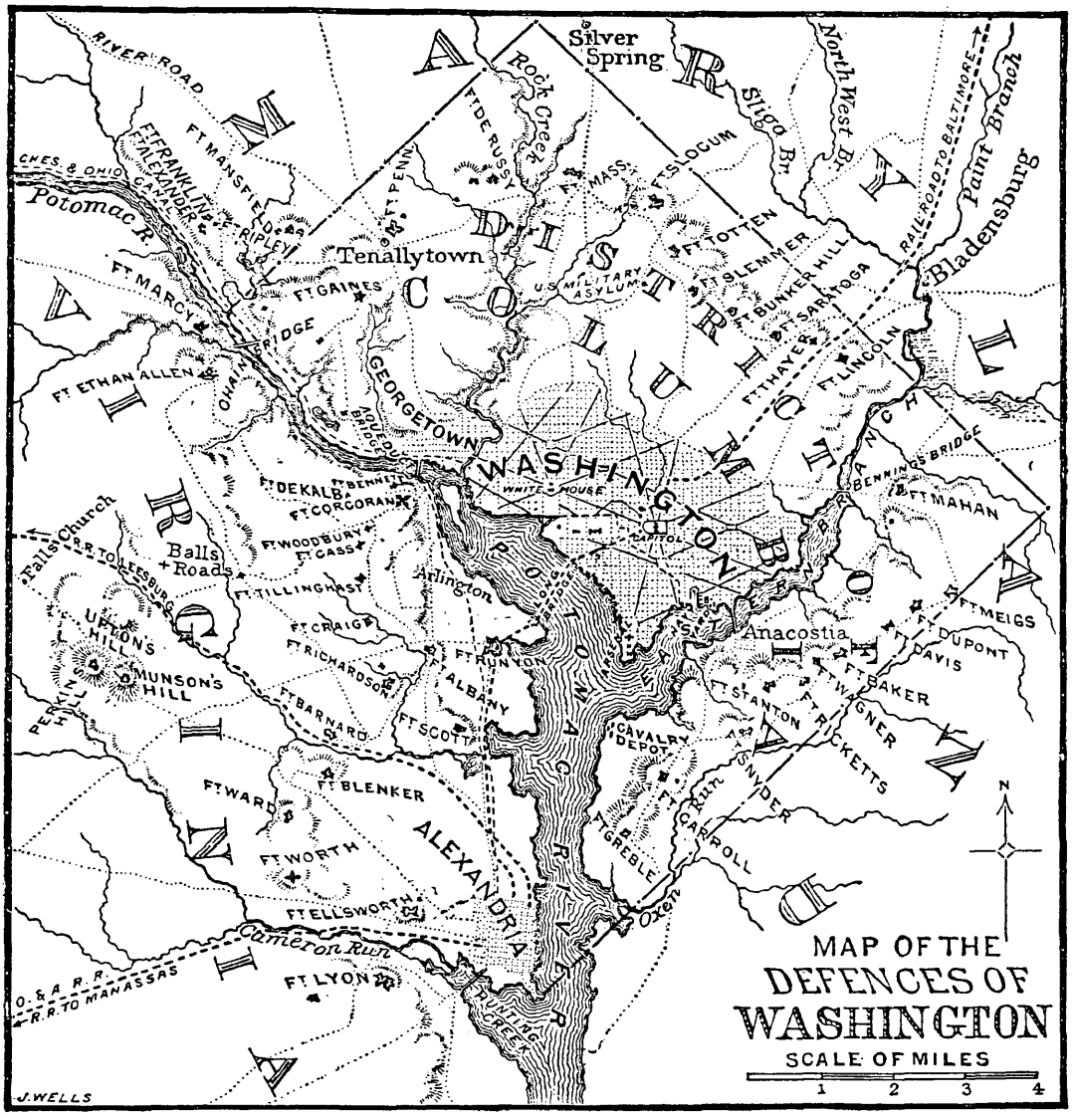
[7]McClellan, Report, 47-49; Idem, McClellan's Own Story, 113-14.

[8]Ibid, 226-27. This statement refutes Reed's thesis that McClellan had a cohesive overall strategy. Reed, 33-44. What he actually posited was an ego-centric Eastern-based plan that focused all attention on himself and ignored simple military exigencies (such as the need simultaneously to open Union lines of communication along the South's rivers and to cut the Confederates' lines), much less political considerations. McClellan, far from having a strategic sense of the entire war, fully expected to bleed Western armies to plump up the Army of the Potomac, which, under his command, would then win the war. In fact, it was to be the campaigns in the West that wore down the Confederacy, even before Sherman cut it in two.



THE DEFENSES OF WASHINGTON DURING THE ANTIETAM CAMPAIGN, SEPTEMBER 1-20, 1862.

Figure 1. Defense fortifications of Washington, D.C., September, 1862. From Battles and Leaders, 2:543.

were imperfect."[9] Privately he described the city as absolutely defenseless and wrote his wife not to come to Washington because it was not safe.[10] To the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War (CCW) he explained, "During the fall . . . my general object [was] to place Washington in a perfectly safe condition, and to organize an army that might operate on any line of operations, leaving Washington entirely secure."[11]

His first priority was fortifications. Washington's thirty-seven mile perimeter was to be protected by a system of forty-eight works mounting 300 guns: forts, lunettes, redoubts, and batteries.[12] He assigned the task of constructing these to Major John G. Barnard of the Corps of Engineers, who set about it with high energy. Disregarding

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[9]McClellan before the Committee, 28 February 1862, United States Congress--Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, The Army of the Potomac History of its Campaigns, the Peninsula, Maryland, Fredericksburg, 3 Vols (New York: Tribune Assn., 1863), 1:2-3. Hereinafter referred to as JCCW.

[10]McClellan, Report, 50-51; McClellan to Ellen Mary McClellan, 18 August 1861, McClellan's Own Story, 88. In fact, the General thought it better to move the Federal capital to New York, but realized this was not politically feasible. "The defence of the capital, containing, as it did, the executive and legislature, the archives of the government, the public buildings, the honor and prestige of the nation, and, as time moved on, vast amounts of military supplies, was a matter of vital importance, and it was necessary to protect it not only from capture, but also against insult." Ibid., 93.

[11]JCCW, 2.

[12]Leech, 139-140.

fields, orchards, houses, and churches, he built rifle trenches, earthworks and military roads. The main forts were placed half a mile apart, with twelve- to eighteen-foot thick parapets on the exposed fronts. There were also abatis of cut and intertwined trees. The exterior defense line was extended south of the Potomac to cover the vital port of Alexandria. North of the capital the forts were placed so as to command arteries of travel--the Rockville Turnpike, Baltimore Turnpike and Railroad, the Seventh Street road. The Major built big field works and auxiliary batteries on strategic points such as the ridge east of the Anacostia River (Eastern Branch) and above the "receiving reservoir" of the aqueduct, Washington's water supply.

With only twelve officers on his staff, by December Barnard had constructed twenty-three forts south of the Potomac, fourteen forts and three batteries between the Potomac and the Anacostia, and eleven forts beyond the Anacostia. The works on the right bank of the Potomac were larger, since they faced the more dangerous front. Most were enclosed earthworks, though several were lunettes with stockaded gorges. They were usually armed with twenty-four- to thirty-two-pounders on seacoast carriages. There was a limited number of 24-pound siege guns, Parrott rifles and lighter calibre field guns. Magazines with a capacity of one hundred pounds of ammunition were constructed in each fort. All in all, Barnard's system of forts was "larger,

more numerous, more carefully built, and much more heavily armed than those justly celebrated lines of Wellington" at Torres Vedras, after which he modeled his works.[13]

Meanwhile, McClellan began building his Army. Cavalry and artillery, he said, were "almost entirely neglected until I assumed command."[14] He used the Regular Army infantry as the nucleus of reserves and tried for an artillery ratio of two and a half pieces per 1000 men, three per 1000 if possible.[15] McClellan also reorganized his staff and authorized Allan Pinkerton, head of a successful private investigative firm, to establish a secret service to gather intelligence for the Army.[16]

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[13]B.L. Alexander, "The Peninsular Campaign," Atlantic Monthly 13 (March 1864), 380. By the end of 1863 the Washington defensive network included sixty forts, ninety-three batteries and 837 guns, manned by 23,000 men. In the connected system of works, every eight hundred to one thousand yards there was an enclosed fort. Any important approach or low ground not covered by a fort had a battery to guard it. Everything was connected by rifle trenches large enough for four ranks of men. In the Spring of 1864, when General Ulysses S. Grant called many from the Washington defenses, they were replaced by semi-invalid veteran reserves. Thus, on 10 and 11 July, as Confederate Jubal Early approached along the left bank of the Potomac, there were only 9,000 troops to man the city's fortifications. Cooling, 53-55.

[14]McClellan to Cameron, 8 September 1861, McClellan Papers.

[15]Idem, Report, 55-56.

[16]Allan Pinkerton, The Spy of the Rebellion; Being a True History of the Spy System of the United States Army During the Late Rebellion. Revealing Many Secrets of the War Hitherto not Made Public (Hartford, Conn.: Chas. P. Hatch, Publisher, 1886), 245, 248.

In a memo in late October to Cameron, McClellan reported at least 150,000 Confederates on the Potomac, "strong, well drilled and equipped, ably commanded and strongly intrenched."[17] He listed requirements for an advance: for an active operations force, 150,000 men and 400 guns; for the Washington garrison, 35,000 men and 40 guns; to guard the Upper Potomac to Harpers Ferry, 5,000 men and 12 guns; for the Lower Potomac, 8,000 men and 24 guns; for the Baltimore-Annapolis garrison, 10,000 men and 12 guns. That came to 208,000 men (or 240,000, to allow for sickness, non-duty, etc.) and 488 guns.[18]

McClellan's plans for a grand Caesarean prosecution of the war were taking shape, but so far it was just that: plans. And there were others in the government with different ideas on how to win the war.

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[17]The troop return for the entire Department of Northern Virginia for November listed a total of 82,553 troops, or 51,943 present for duty, spread out over the Potomac, Valley and Aquia Districts. OR 5:974.

[18]McClellan, Report, 46.

CHAPTER THREE
VILE CONTAGION

> We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,
> And in the spirit of men there is no blood.
> II, i

McClellan aside, probably few were pleased with the way the war was going, but the Radicals were beside themselves. The military stalemate was only part of it: the political and politico-military situation was all wrong. In the aftermath of Bull Run, Congress passed the Crittenden Resolution, defining war aims in terms that set the Radicals' teeth on edge: it was to be fought simply to restore the Union status quo ante bellum, not to destroy slavery.[1] The Jacobins were not strong enough to stop this declaration; they would have to gather forces in order to marshal public opinion behind them. The Democratic New York Herald laid the Manassas failure on the Radicals' doorstep, blaming the too-hasty action on their desire "to divert this war from its legitimate objective . . . into an

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[1]Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals, 32-33.

exterminating crusade against Southern slavery."[2] The Radicals in turn attributed the defeat to a lack of fervor--military, if not Executive.

Then there was the problem of Frémont, who, in his way was to prove as sore a point to the Lincoln Administration as McClellan was in his. Pushed by the Radicals, in July Lincoln appointed Frémont to the command of the Western Department headquartered in Missouri. It was an important post, as Lincoln was trying desperately to hold onto the the border states, but from beginning to end, Fremont bungled it. Charges of corruption and malfeasance were rife. Yet Lincoln hesitated to fire the Radical favorite, to the disgust of his outspoken Attorney General.[3] Finally, Frémont's military incompetence and political maladministration outweighed the Radicals' support, and Lincoln removed him from command.[4]

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[2]23 July 1861, New York Herald, in Trefousse, Radical Republicans, 174-75.

[3]Writing his brother-in-law, Governor of Missouri, Bates railed, "General Frémont is not to be removed--at least until he has had a full opportunity to retrieve his fortunes, or to ruin our state utterly and endanger our cause." Bates to H.R. Gamble, 27 September 1861, in Allan Nevins, Frémont, Pathmarker of the West (New York, London: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1939), 530n.

[4]Sandburg, War Years, 2:120. Radical pressure was such that Lincoln was forced to replace Frémont with David Hunter, another political general who was at least as radical as Frémont. Trefousse, Radical Republicans, 177.

Meanwhile, there was another thorn in the Radicals' side. On 21 October, near Leesburg, Virginia, Colonel Edward Baker was killed at the battle of Ball's Bluff. Baker, former Senator from Oregon, Radical Republican and friend of the President, was largely responsible for his own death, for the political appointee was a military fool. But the Radicals seized upon the battle and Baker's death as a cause célèbre, and, as with Bull Run, demanded inquiries to find and punish those responsible for the Union losses. The immediate scapegoat was General Charles Stone, Baker's commander at Ball's Bluff, but McClellan, who had issued orders for an advance, was also implicated.

At first the Radicals had welcomed McClellan, Democrat though he be, as someone who would take action, and they supported him in his efforts to unseat Scott as General-in-Chief. In October, he wrote his wife that he was conspiring with Wade, Trumbull and Chandler to depose Scott.[5]

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[5]McClellan to Ellen McClellan, 26 October 1861, in George B. McClellan, The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan, Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865, ed. Stephen W. Sears, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 112. Herinafter referred to as Civil War Correspondence. At the same time, Scott was complaining to Cameron of McClellan's insubordination. "Has then a senior, no corrective power over a junior officer in case of such persistent neglect and disobedience?" he wondered. A court martial would be in order, he went on, except that a contest of authority would be detrimental to the prosecution of the war. Scott to Cameron, 4 [?] October 1861, Papers of Edwin M. Stanton, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

Yet pressure was building on McClellan to take the field with his growing Army. In October, "the Jacobin Club"--Trumbull, Chandler and Wade--approached the General, urging him to go to battle. He resisted, blaming Scott for his reluctance.[6] The next day the same three "came up to worry the administration into a battle," noted the President's secretary. Lincoln defended McClellan and "deprecated" the new outbreak of impatience, but "at the same time said it was a reality and must be taken into account."[7] Finally, the Radicals went to Seward and Cameron in the same cause.[8]

By this time the Radicals were thoroughly disenchanted with the administration. Wade sniped to Chandler, "You could not inspire Old Abe, Seward, Chase, or Bates with a galvanic battery"; while Chandler wrote a friend that Lincoln "means well but has no force of character. He is surrounded by Old Fogy [sic] Army officers more than half of whom are downright traitors and the other one half sympathize with the South."[9] Moreover, both Wade and

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[6]Hans L. Trefousse, Benjamin Franklin Wade, Radical Republican from Ohio (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963), 154.

[7]26 October 1861, Hay, 31.

[8]Trefousse, Wade, 155.

[9]Trefousse, Radical Republicans, 179-180.

Chandler had lost faith in McClellan.[10] Winfield Scott had also reached his limit; on 1 November, he retired, succeeded by McClellan as General-in-Chief of Union forces.

But in December Congress convened, and the Radicals gathered strength for their drive against Lincoln and McClellan.[11] On 4 December, the House rescinded the Crittenden Resolution, thus repudiating the President's hope that the war be fought solely to preserve the Union. Then what one historian called the "spearhead of the Radical drive against the administration" was formed: the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War.[12] All except Chandler (a merchant) were lawyers; none had military training or experience. Wade, Chandler, Julian, and Covode were abolitionists and ardent supporters of Frémont.[13] Chandler and Wade's idea of strategy was continual attack; all were

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[10]Warren W. Hassler, Jr., General George B. McClellan Shield of the Union (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 32.

[11]Trefousse, Radical Republicans, 181.

[12]Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals, 64. Williams terms the committee "the unnatural child of lustful radicalism and a confused conservatism." Only two of the seven members were Democrats, Tennessee Senator Andrew Johnson and New York Representative Moses F. Odell. The other members were Chandler from the Senate and George W. Julian of Indiana, Dan Gooch of Massachusetts, and John Covode of Pennsylvania from the House of Representatives. Ibid, 65.

[13]William R. Pierson, "The Committee on the Conduct of the Civil War," American Historical Review 23 (April 1918), 558.

scornful of the idea that military expertise was anything special.[14] Welles viewed them all as "extreme and violent . . . implacable and revengeful" and thought them as irrational as the secessionists themselves.[15]

Charged with inquiring into the conduct of the war, the Committee was free to call any witness it chose. Its proceedings were secret, although they could be "leaked" as it suited the Radicals; in some respects it acted as an inquisition--ferreting out heretics in the military and exposing their iniquities to the world at large. Its members had no legislative function but reported their findings to the President or gave policy advice on the basis of the military and ideological sins they had uncovered.[16] Objects of their inquiry, such as General Stone, could be brought before the CCW to defend military decisions without knowing the charges against them or the testimony already heard. The CCW's powers were actually limited: it could question officials, but not dismiss or appoint them; however, members did have influence.[17]

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[14]Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals, 72.

[15]Welles, Lincoln's Administration, 71.

[16]Pierson, 560.

[17]Hans L. Trefousse, "The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War: A Reassessment:" Civil War History 10 (1964), 19.

The CCW was a weighty cross for Lincoln, although it did have its usefulness in his schema: he was willing to move with the times, but was always conscious of the need for the support of conservatives, especially in the border states. Therefore he used Radical pressure, through the activities and pronouncements of the Committee, to push "slow" generals and politicians.[18] For example, on 31 December, the CCW called on the President to demand action on both the military and abolition fronts. The next day, Lincoln spoke to McClellan, mentioning the Committee's visit in an attempt to encourage the General to move.[19]

On 23 December, the Committee called McClellan to testify. Ill (probably with typhoid), he did not appear. But in rapid succession, many of his subordinates were called. J.P. Richardson, Samuel P. Heintzelman, William B. Franklin, Montgomery C. Meigs, James S. Wadsworth, and McDowell were only the first.[20] Heintzelman noted that the roads in Northern Virginia were too "narrow and contracted" to maneuver a force the size of the Army of the Potomac;

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[18]Trefousse, Radical Republicans, 182. Trefousse elsewhere notes that the Committee's influence was actually limited: Lincoln took care of McClellen in his own good time, not the CCW's. Likewise in the cases of Fremont and Butler: though the darlings of the Radicals and their Committee, Lincoln had the final say in whether the former got a prize command or the latter stayed in New Orleans. Idem, "Joint Committee," 15-16.

[19]Ibid., 13.

[20]JCCW, 1:70-71.

Franklin outlined the possibilities of an expedition to Urbana, on the Rappahannock River. He added that once the Confederate Army had crossed the Rappahannock and burnt its railroad bridge, a Federal attack across the river would be too costly, and too easily defended by the Rebels.[21]

Meanwhile, Lincoln proposed that the Army of the Potomac hold the Confederates at Centerville with 50,000 men, while another 50,000 flanked Johnston across the Potomac at Occoquan Creek.[22] McClellan leisurely rejected the suggestion, saying that he had "another plan of campaign that I do not think at all anticipated by the enemy, nor by many of our own people."[23] But the General gave the President no details and thus set the stage for future frustrations. Handicapped by his lack of military training, Lincoln depended on his military advisors and commanders to give him information needed to set strategic policy. The plan McClellan was entertaining was probably that vaguely outlined by Franklin before the CCW--a move on Richmond from the Lower Chesapeake, but he did not deign to explain it. When McClellan brusquely rejected Lincoln's proposal without

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[21]Heintzelman before CCW, 24 December, 1861, JCCW, Report, 118; Franklin before CCW, 26 December, 1861, Ibid., 125-27.

[22]Lincoln to McClellan, c. 1 December 1861, Abraham Lincoln, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Unviersity Press, 1953-1955), 5:34.

[23]McClellan, Civil War Correspondence, 143.

developing and presenting an alternative, he did his campaign and his country a great disservice.[24] The President felt that "the military machine, both East and West, was not only at a complete standstill, but was without a programme."[25]

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[24]Alexander S. Webb, The Peninsula, McClellan's Campaign of 1862, vol. 3, Campaigns of the Civil War (New York: Jack Brussel, Publisher, n.d.), 14-15.

[25]John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln, A History (New York: Century Co., 1886-1890), 5:100.

CHAPTER FOUR
INSTRUMENTS OF FEAR AND WARNING

> But it is doubtful yet
> Whether Caesar will come forth to-day or no;
> II, i

On the sixth of January, the CCW met with the full Cabinet to discuss McClellan. They took no action but recommended that McDowell replace McClellan.[1] A few days later, Bates urged--not for the first time--that Lincoln simply take over military command; the President and Cameron protested that the generals would not like such a course of events.[2] Lincoln sought further advice.

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[1]Trefousse, Radical Republicans, 185.

[2]10 January 1862, Edward Bates, The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866, ed. Howard K. Beale, vol. 4 of Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1930 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), 224. Bates had urged this for months: Lincoln, "being 'Commander in Chief' by law, he must command. . . . The Nation requires it, and History will hold him responsible." Bates also saw no reason for a General-in-Chief: not only was there no general with experience with large armies, this one told no one anything of his plans, "so that the strange and dangerous fact exists, that the Sec. of War and the Prest. are ignorant of the condition of the army and its intended operations." 31 December, 1861, Ibid., 218-19.

On the advice of Quartermaster General Meigs, the President called a war council of McDowell, Franklin, Chase, Seward, and an Assistant Secretary of War.[3] Lincoln described the pressures on him and recounted recent military failures in the West. What was to be done? McDowell recommended organizing the Army of the Potomac into corps d'armee and moving from Washington along railroad lines, all of which led to the enemy's position. Franklin suggested an operation on the York River toward Richmond. But since neither general knew the condition of the Army of the Potomac, the meeting was adjourned until the next night, so they could look into it.

Blair,the only cabinet member with military expertise, joined that meeting. By now, McDowell and Franklin agreed that if the question was of an immediate advance (which was Lincoln's hope), the best movement now would not involve a change of base (i.e., to the York River). Blair stood up for Franklin's Peninsula project--he thought it had a better chance of significant victory. Seward just wanted any win, and Chase agreed that the moral power of any success would suit the administration's purposes.[4]

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[3]Cameron was conspicuous by his absence. He had finally been mired in his own malfeasance and was in the process of being eased out of office and into the Ambassadorship to Russia.

[4]In November, Chase had consulted with McClellen, because he was finding it hard to sell government bonds--investors were disinclined to back an Administration that at best was not winning the war, and at worst might lose it.

On the 12th, McClellan, having got wind of these councils, was up and around; Lincoln announced they would all meet with him the next day.[5] An icy McClellan joined the previous lot. He sat silently until Meigs pointed out to him that the Commander-in-Chief had the right to hear his plans for his armies. McClellan eventually muttered that Don Carlos Buell was set to advance soon in Kentucky, and this seemed to be enough for Lincoln. It was an ugly scene: McClellan believed McDowell was conniving against him; Chase blustered and blundered; Lincoln desperately sought some reassurance that the military situation was under control; and Meigs concluded that "McClellan would prefer to send forward any other troops than those under his present command."[6]

At about this same time, Cameron's activities had finally put him beyond the pale. The last straw was the War Department's annual report, which contained a strongly-

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On the basis of McClellan's assurances that the Army of the Potomac would make a significant movement to Urbana, the Treasury Secretary was able to sell bonds. J.W. Schuckers, The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1874), 445. Thus Chase apparently knew of this plan although Lincoln did not.

[5]William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, A Critical History of Operations in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania from the Commencement to the Close of the War, 1861-1865 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), 79-84.

[6]Montgomery C. Meigs, "General M.C. Meigs on the Conduct of the Civil War," American Historical Review 26 (January 1921), 293.

worded emancipation statement, issued to the press without Lincoln's authorization.[7] With a certain clumsiness, Lincoln negotiated the Secretary of War's resignation and appointed him Ambassador to Russia, effective the same day as the final war council. His replacement was to play a much bigger role in the running of the war, and in the upcoming campaign, than Cameron ever would have done.

Edwin M. Stanton's appointment as Secretary of War was something of a surprise. An anti-slavery Democrat, he had served briefly in Buchanan's cabinet as Attorney General, but upon Lincoln's taking office, Stanton returned to private law practice and was a caustic critic of the new administration. Yet he saw some benefits of the present conflict, as he noted just before the firing on Fort Sumter.

> I do not think peaceful relations will continue much longer. Nor indeed do I think hostilities will be so great an evil as many apprehend. A round or two often serves to restore harmony; and the vast consumption required by a state of

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[7]It must be remembered that Lincoln's overriding concern was for the retention of the border states, and he felt that a program of emancipation would alienate those in these areas who would otherwise remain loyal. He also doubted his ability to enforce any such policy. He only succumbed to abolitionist/ Radical pressure to proclaim limited emancipation after McClellan repulsed Lee at Antietam late in 1862, whereupon there was trouble with many soldiers, who declared that they had gone to war to restore the Union, but would not fight for "niggers." Cameron's statement in December, 1861, was therefore presumptuous, premature and precipitate.

hostilities will enrich rather than impoverish the North.[8]

Of all Lincoln's coterie, Stanton "presented the strangest medley of individual attributes," observed one contemporary. He respected the President's authority because it was greater than his own, but he did not have a high opinion of Lincoln's fitness for the position.[9] The Navy Secretary characterized Stanton as a zealous, devoted and hard worker, adept at intrigue and able to influence Congressional leaders; he was also "a hypocrite, [and] a moral coward."[10] There were those who believed Stanton was not "the gruff, disagreeable personage he is so generally represented"; but Lincoln's own private secretary John Hay once begged his confrere John G. Nicolay not to send him to

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[8]Stanton to John A. Dix, 8 April 1861, in Drozdowski, 376. Stanton's rather Draconian viewpoint was further exemplified by his support of the suspension of habeas corpus and his attitude in the case of General Stone. Stanton remained unmoved by the general disgraced and ruined without benefit of Consitutionally-guaranteed due process of law. "To hold one commander in prison untried," he opined, "is less harmful in times of great national distress than to withdraw several good officers from active battle-fields to give him a trial. Individuals are nothing; we are contributing thousands of them to save the Union, and General Stone in [confinement in] Fort Lafayette is doing his share in that direction." Frank A. Flower, Edwin McMaster Stanton The Autocrat of Rebellion, Emancipation and Reconstruction (Akron, Ohio: Saalfield Publishing Company, 1905), 137.

[9]McClure, 157-58.

[10]Undated entry, Gideon Welles, Diary of Gideon Welles, ed., Howard K. Beale (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1960), 1:68.

Stanton to ask favors, for "I would rather make a tour of a smallpox hospital."[11]

Stanton had clear views on power in general and the Executive Office's exercise of it in particular.

> He recognized no limit upon executive power in the execution of the laws and the defense of the Constitution. Equally sure was he that there was no other restraint upon the President's powers as the supreme military commander than were to be found in the Articles of War and the Usages of Nations.[12]

As Secretary of War, Stanton felt he was Commander-in-Chief. He yielded only to Lincoln's authority.[13] He had nothing but contempt for professional soldiers and enjoyed his power over them.[14] Attorney General Bates decided early on that, as far as generals were concerned, Stanton would "assuredly speak to them in orders."[15] And a foreign military observer noted that Stanton was "instrumental, more than any one else, in developing in Mr. Lincoln's mind the idea of

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[11]Frederick Milnes Edge, Major-General McClellan and the Campaign on the Yorktown Peninsula (London: Trubner & Co., 1865), 63; Allan Nevins, The War for the Union (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 2:35.

[12]George C. Gorham, Life and Public Services of Edwin M. Stanton (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1899), 327.

[13]McClure, 162.

[14]Williams, Lincoln and the Generals, 57.

[15]2 February 1862, Bates, 228. This, of course, was only as it should be, to Bates's way of thinking. Lincoln was the Commander-in-Chief; Stanton the President's lieutenant. Bates never ceased urging Lincoln to command.

directing military operations in person, from the depths of the White House."[16]

Throughout the fall and winter of 1861, Stanton cultivated McClellan. "Success was always Stanton's touchstone, and McClellan's star seemed to be rising irresistibly."[17] As early as October, after Cameron made an abolition speech to a newly-arrived regiment, McClellan reported that Stanton urged him to arrest the War Secretary for inciting to insubordination and advocated the General seizing the government and becoming dictator.[18] Soon McClellan was writing to his wife that in order to get any work done he had to escape to Stanton's house "to dodge all enemies in shape of 'browsing' Presidents etc. . . ."[19] It was Stanton who had advised McClellan of the President's war

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[16]Philippe, Comte de Paris, "McClellan's Organizing the Grand Army," in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Clarence C. Buel & Robert U. Johnson (New York, Century Press, 1887-1888) 2:120.

[17]Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 131. There is no definitive biography of Stanton, which is a loss to any study of the Civil War. This and the Gorham and Flowers works are all that is available in published form; they are individually and collectively lacking. Drozdowski's dissertation, more than 1000 pages long, was to have been only the first part of a complete study of Lincoln's War Secretary; but evidently the rather ambitious project was never completed.

[18]McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 152.

[19]McClellan to Ellen McClellan, sometime in October or November, 1861, McClellan Papers.

conferences in January, warning him, "They are counting on your death, and are already dividing among themselves your military goods and chattels."[20]

Soon after taking office, however, Stanton became a "convert" to the Radical cause.[21] He was not a hypocrite in this respect, said one observer, but genuinely changed his beliefs after gaining power: he was "a sound and sincere friend, political and personal, of the men who showered their favors on his head."[22] Horace Greeley's New York Tribune and William Cullen Bryant's New York Post, both Radical/abolitionist in slant, defended Stanton's appointment: he was, after all, approved by Wade, Fessenden and Trumbull. Even the Democratic New York Herald on 14 January gave Stanton credit for "a strong head, clean hands, and a pure heart,"[23] Fessenden commented on his first meeting with the new War Secretary that "we agreed perfectly on all points. If he acts up to his promises, he will be just the man for Secty of War."[24] Stanton began immediately to cultivate the Radicals of Congress and continued this

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[20]Idem, McClellan's Own Story, 155.

[21]Henry L. Dawes, "Recollections of Stanton under Lincoln," Atlantic Monthly 25 (February 1894), 167.

[22]Jeremiah S. Black, "Senator Wilson and Edwin M. Stanton," Galaxy 9 (June 1870), 823.

[23]Drozdowski, 559-60; 540.

[24]Fessenden to Chase, 15 January 1862, Papers of Salmon P. Chase, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

practice throughout the war and beyond. It seems clear that he befriended and encouraged McClellan while the latter was in the ascendancy and favor was to be accrued through association with him. Then, when Stanton had achieved power of his own, he could afford to turn on McClellan, particularly at a time when the General was coming under attack.

Almost immediately after Stanton's appointment, McClellan began to notice a change in his erstwhile supporter. Later, he was to date the start of his troubles from Stanton's taking office, claiming the new Secretary "did many things to break up the free and confidential intercourse that had heretofore existed between the President and myself."[25] This statement is as much a commentary on McClellan's grasp of the situation as it is on Stanton's activities. Nonetheless, Stanton was not without his use as a catspaw, as far as Lincoln was concerned. It would seem that the President put up with Stanton's machinations because he brought order to a chaotic War Department, could be useful in dealing with the Radicals, and was one man who could bear the consequences of costly decisions and unpopular actions. When friends remonstrated with the President over Stanton's propensity to pre-empt power, Lincoln observed that he might eventually have to

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[25]George B. McClellan, "The Peninsular Campaign," in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 2:163-64.

"put bricks in [Stanton's] pockets," but in the meantime, the Secretary could safely be allowed to jump about.[26]

But the Radicals were not quiescent. There was an active public campaign against "bad" cabinet members and generals and continuing pressure to invade the South. As one Radical put it, "We want the army to kill somebody."[27] In the absence of strategic confidences from his General-in-Chief, Lincoln succumbed. The President's General War Order No. 1 and Special War Order No. 1, mandated a general movement of all Union forces by 22 February and directed that, after first providing for the defense of Washington, the Army of the Potomac was to move toward Manassas Junction. These two orders seemed to undermine McClellan and raised the Radicals' hopes for deposing him.[28] The immediate danger to McClellan was slight; Lincoln still expressed confidence in him and was only frustrated by the thought of, in essence, having his Army all dressed up with no place to go.[29] Yet they were an indication of the limits on the President's patience.

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[26]Sandburg, War Years, 2:149-50.

[27]G.S. Ward to Fessenden, 23 January 1862, in Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals, 80-81.

[28]Drozdowski, 716-18.

[29]Orville H. Browning, The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning, eds. Theodore C. Pease & James G. Randall (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925), 1:525.

Lincoln clearly favored direct movement and was equally forthright in his concern for the security of the capital. Yet in response to a query from the President regarding the relative merits of his and the General's plans, McClellan dismissed Washington as a base of operations, since from there it was too hard to attack the enemy at his presumed weak points. The Confederates were in a strong central position, and the weather had made roads in Northern Virginia impassable.

In contrast, using the Lower Chesapeake Bay as a base of operations would be better because it would force the Rebels to move from around Manassas to defend Richmond and Norfolk. The Rebel capital was a mere sixty miles west on a railroad line from West Point, with better terrain. Moreover this plan would put the Army of the Potomac in the position of deciding the place and disposition of battle. If there should be a defeat or setback, it would have a safe base in Fortress Monroe and the fleet. Further, a Peninsular attack would open up the Carolinas and Georgia, making it easier to reduce all southern ports, cut communications, and take the Mississippi River, breaking off Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas.[30] This plan of attack would

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[30]Lincoln to McClellan, 3 February 1862, in McClellan, Report, 97-98; McClellan to Stanton, 3 February 1862, Ibid., 98-107.

not endanger Washington, McClellan said, but he did not elaborate on how this should be so.[31]

To the General's mind, his plan made perfect sense--militarily. But he did not consider either the political or the psychological side of Lincoln's query. Washington must not only be safe, it must be seen to be safe. Lincoln was grappling with domestic pressure from all sides--Democrats to Radicals--as well as trying to prevent foreign powers from allying with or supporting the Confederacy. It was vital that the nation's capital be (or perhaps more important, seem) inviolable. If political considerations made him unreasonable about this issue, it behooved the General-in-Chief who was charged with the overall management of the war to reassure his President that proper precautions had been taken. But McClellan did not do this, and an important command link between the military and civil authorities was thereby broken.

Meanwhile, Bates noted the turmoil and discontent pervading Washington, and predicted that it was bound to shake up the administration. He attributed this to McClellan's inactivity.[32]

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[31]McClellan to Stanton, 3 February 1862, in McClellan, Civil War Correspondence, 169.

[32]Bates diary entry, 3 February 1862, in Hendricks, 299. At the same time the Attorney General was uneasy about the CCW's delivering its report on General Stone and Ball's Bluff to Stanton. "I feared the establishment of precedent for congressional interference with the command of the army, which might lead to the terrible results seen in France, in

But there was movement in the West. Victories at Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee raised northern morale and made Lincoln somewhat more inclined to indulge the General's campaign plan. They also created a climate of antagonism between McClellan and Stanton. Northern armies could move, and southern armies could be defeated. Why, then, was the Army of the Potomac stagnant? The antagonism erupted in the press, with the New York Herald leading the pack for McClellan and the Tribune (among others) backing Stanton.[33]

McClellan later charged that Stanton hereupon embarked on a deliberate campaign to sabotage the General's plans.[34] If this was the case, one opening salvo might have been a letter of 20 February that Stanton sent to the New York Tribune in which he pointedly jabbed at McClellan's much-touted success in organizing and training the Army of the Potomac. Progress in the war, the Secretary declared, was not due to "military combinations and organizing victory," but to "the Spirit of the Lord" which inspired and moved Union soldiers and rattled the Confederates. Stanton went on to blast the "stupendous and solemn folly in the Cabinet"

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the days of the revolution," he wrote. 3 February 1862, Bates, Diary, 229.

[33]Drozdowski, 643.

[34]McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 195.

that supported such a belief in organization, which could not infuse confidence into the people.[35]

Another shot was the organization of the Army of the Potomac into corps d'armee. This issue was crucial in several ways. Generally, even military men agreed that in armies the size of those currently being fielded, there needed to be some sort of extra-divisional organization: it was simply not feasible to break up command into so many pieces. But many of McClellan's senior generals--the ones likeliest to be made corps commanders--were also those most inclined to give him trouble: they were older than he and often Republican (some political appointees), unlike the younger, Democratic generals, most of whom owed their rank and position to McClellan himself. So McClellan had said over and over that he wished to make the determinations as to command after he led the army into the field and could evaluate the division commanders' leadership abilities.

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[35]John C. Ropes, "General McClellan's Plans for the Campaign of 1862, and the Alleged Interference of the Government with Them," paper read before the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 13 November 1876, in Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, The Peninsular Campaign of General McClellan in 1862: Papers Read before the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts in 1876, 1877, 1878 and 1880 (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1881), 1:19-21. Hereinafter referred to as MHSM 1.

Radicals and Stanton pushed the reorganization precisely because the senior generals--all friendly to the Radical cause--would get the corps commands.[36]

Stanton also secretly embarked upon a campaign to induce the aging General Ethan Allen Hitchcock to replace McClellan. This was passing strange, considering the general was not only 63 years old, but in extreme ill-health. Hitchcock himself was appalled that Stanton would imagine him capable of field command, even though Stanton said that he and Lincoln were hard put to withstand the demands for McClellan's removal.[37] Hitchcock refused command but agreed to remain in Washington to advise the Secretary (and President).

On 20 February, Willie Lincoln, 11, died after a four-week bout with typhoid. The President's youngest son Tad was also very ill.[38] The personal tragedy must have weighed on Lincoln's mind, perhaps sapping him of the energy

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[36]Trefousse, Wade, 167-68.

[37]15 March 1862, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Fifty Years in Camp and Field, Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A., ed. W.A. Croffut (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, Knickerbocker Press, 1909), 438-39. Stanton had lured Hitchcock to the capital claiming that the President wanted the benefit of the General's experience; Hitchcock was reluctant--he was unfit for service, being bedridden even as Stanton made his appeal. The General concluded, "On the whole, I am uncomfortable, I am almost afraid that Secretary Stanton hardly knows what he wants, himself." Ibid., 439.

[38]Browning, 1:530.

necessary to press for clear answers from McClellan, fend off Radical demands, or curb his War Secretary.[39]

The situation was exacerbated at the end of February, when McClellan's attempt to retake Harpers Ferry and rebuild the railroad bridge there was foiled by the belated discovery that his transports were six inches too wide for the canal locks. He looked foolish, and the Radicals pressured Lincoln to rein in McClellan.[40] Lincoln held his counsel for the nonce. But events in March were to force his hand.

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[39]Stanton complained that he was ready to move militarily, but he could only do so through the President, who was distraught over his sons' illness. 16 February 1862, Stanton to Chase, Papers of Salmon P. Chase, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

[40]Drozdowski, 665-66.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISTURBED SKY

Beware the ides of March!
I, ii

On 8 March, Lincoln called McClellan to his office to tell him that he was displeased with the outcome of the Harpers Ferry foray and that there was a rumor making the rounds to the effect that McClellan's plan to change his base of operations was a treasonous conspiracy to leave Washington defenseless.[1] McClellan of course bridled at such a suggestion and, in the words of one historian, decided on a flanking maneuver around the President's concerns about the Peninsula Campaign.[2]

He convened a meeting of his division commanders and General Randolph B. Marcy, his chief of staff and father-in-

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[1]McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 195-96 McClellan attributed Lincoln's aspersions on the Harpers Ferry situation to Stanton's malevolence. He claimed that the Secretary lied to him regarding Lincoln's understanding and acceptance of McClellan's explanation of those events and that this interview was, in effect, the fruit of Stanton's campaign to undermine his relationship with the Commander-in-Chief. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 195-96. Drozdowski, using Heintzelman's journal and Stanton papers lists this as 7 March. Drozdowski, 670-71.

[2]Drozdowski, 670-71.

law. Marcy outlined both plans of advance, Urbana and Manassas. Erasmus D. Keyes, Andrew Porter, Fitz-John Porter, William B. Franklin, William F. Smith, Henry M. Naglee, George M. McCall, and Louis Blenker approved the Urbana plan; Heintzelman, McDowell, John G. Barnard, and Edwin V. Sumner opposed it.[3]

Lincoln was reluctant to face down the preference of McClellan and eight generals, but Stanton argued that the vote figures were skewed: each of the eight approving generals owed his rank to McClellan. Only those independent of the Commanding General's patronage had voted the merits of the plan. Therefore he urged Lincoln to refuse authorization for the change of operational base.[4] But Lincoln as a civilian did not want responsibility for a military failure if he overruled McClellan.[5]

That same day, the Confederate Navy sent the ironclad CSS Virginia into the Federal blockade fleet at Hampton Roads inflicting severe losses. This caused a great stir in Washington; even McClellan was upset. The fear was that the

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[3]Gorham, 345-46.

[4]Gorham, 346-48.

[5]Drozdowski, 674-75. The last time he did this resulted in the defeat at Bull Run.

Virginia's seeming indestructibility would give it the power to attack with impunity whatever it pleased.[6]

Other events were moving to shape the General's plans. On the 8th also came word that Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston had withdrawn his troops from around Manassas and Centreville and pulled back behind the Rappahannock. Though he claimed the impassable roads made pursuit impossible, the next day McClellan decided to march his Army to the abandoned Confederate positions as a sort of shake-down sortie--a practice exercise preparatory to the real advance.[7] What he found there caused a furor: at least some of the Confederate defenses consisted of logs painted

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[6]Browning, 1:532. Stanton, in particular, was spooked. Welles left an especially rich account of his confrere's reaction. "The Merrimac, he said, would destroy every vessel in the service--could lay every city on the coast under contribution--could take Fortress Monroe--McClellan's [mistaken] purpose to advance by the Peninsula must be abandoned. . . .Likely the first movement would be to come up the Potomac and disperse Congress, destroy the Capitol and public buildings, or she might go to New York and Boston and destroy those cities, or levy from them contributions sufficient to carry on the war." Welles replied that it was unlikely that the Confederate ironclad could be everywhere at once, and the newly-built Union ironclad Monitor would prove to be an adequate check. Stanton, however, was unimpressed when he learned that the Monitor had but two guns: "His mingled look of incredulity and contempt cannot be described," Welles noted. Later that same day, Welles scuttled an attempt by Stanton to sink boats in the Potomac to halt the anticipated assault by the Virginia on Washington's public buildings. Undated entry, Welles, Diary, 63-64, 66-67. Such a project would have obstructed the channel, which McClellan needed open and would in fact have bottled up Washington.

[7]McClellan, Report, 118-119.

and propped up to resemble artillery pieces--"Quaker" guns. All along, McClellan had insisted that his opponents were numerous and well-armed and that he did not have enough men to attack them; this evidence seemed to refute his claims. Coming so soon after the debacle at Harpers Ferry, the discovery made McClellan look doubly incompetent.

While on maneuvers in Manassas, McClellan received the news--in the press--that Lincoln had relieved him as General-in-Chief.[8] At the same time, the President created the Mountain Department west of the Alleghenies, under the command of Fremont, and the Department of the Mississippi under Halleck.[9] All commanders of departments were instructed to "report severally and directly" to Stanton. War Order No. 2 directed that the Army of the Potomac was to make no change in base of operations "without leaving in, and about Washington, such a force as, in the opinion of the General-in-Chief, and the commanders of all the army corps,

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[8]Paris, 122.

[9]President's General War Order No. 3. OR 5:54. The Fremont appointment was purely the result of Radical pressure. In the early part of the year, Fremont appeared before the CCW, and convinced them that the charges against him with respect to his Missouri command were groundless. Nevins, Fremont, 552-54. In March, Wade leaked the full text of the General's testimony to the press; and all over the North newspapers rallied behind him. The Senator believed there must be total war in order to break the slave power; McClellan was not going to provide this, and there must be extraordinary men for extraordinary times. To Wade and the other Radicals, Fremont was just the sort of general needed. Trefousse, Wade, 176-77.

shall leave said city entirely secure." Additional conditions included clearing the Confederate batteries on the Lower Potomac and commencing movement within ten days.[10] There was more.

This order also reorganized the Army of the Potomac into corps, assigning the new commands to the senior generals as a matter of course. McDowell took command of I Corps' four divisions, Sumner of II Corps, Heintzelman of III Corps, and Keyes of IV Corps--each with three divisions. These were to constitute the Army of the Potomac's field operations force. The troops assigned to the defense of Washington went to James S. Wadsworth, Military Governor of the District, and V Corps, operating on the upper Potomac, went to Nathaniel P. Banks.[11] Both Banks and Wadsworth were political appointees. McClellan particularly inveighed against Wadsworth's assignment to such a crucial and high-visibility command, which required a skilled military man--Franklin would be better. But Stanton sanguinely told him

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[10]President's General War Order No. 2, 8 March 1862, Stanton Papers. Lincoln had discussed this with Stanton, Chase and Seward. Seward urged that the directive be issued in Stanton's name in order to strengthen public confidence in him. But Stanton demurred: considering his publicly perceived vendetta against the General, it would seem as though personal animosity had sparked such instructions. The President took responsibility for issuing the order. 11 March 1862, Hay, 37-38. Drozdowski claims that not wanting to give Fremont the Mountain Department command was a factor in Stanton's reluctance to sign the order. Drozdowski, 695.

[11]President's General War Order No. 2, Stanton Papers.

that it must be Wadsworth because the Administration needed to "conciliate the agricultural interests of New York."[12]

Johnston's withdrawal behind the Rappahannock forced McClellan to move his proposed campaign to the York-James Peninsula (if he still wanted to flank the Confederates), using Fortress Monroe as his base of operations. This did not offer quite such glowing prospects for victory, but once the Navy had cleared the James River and reduced the Confederate batteries at Yorktown and Gloucester Point on the York, the Army of the Potomac's lines of communications would be entirely secure. It still presented the advantages of a direct, unexpected route to the Confederate capital and better roads than Lincoln's proposed advance via Manassas.

On 13 March, McClellan convened a council of corps commanders at Fairfax Court House for the purpose of deciding what force should be left at Washington to meet the requirement of War Order No. 3. The commanders agreed unanimously on a Peninsula plan of operations, with the provisos that the Virginia be neutralized, there be adequate transport, and that "the force to be left to cover Washington shall be such as to give an entire feeling of security for its safety from menace." To Keyes,

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[12]McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 226. Wadsworth, who had supported Lincoln over Seward in 1860, would become the (unsuccessful) Greeleyite anti-slavery Republican candidate for Governor of New York in the Fall of 1862. Alden Hatch, The Wadsworths of the Genessee (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1959), 76-77, 83.

Heintzelman, and McDowell, this meant that "with the forts on the right bank of the Potomac fully garrisoned and those on the left bank occupied, a covering force in front of the Virginia line of 25,000 men should suffice." Sumner felt this number should be 40,000.[13] In the face of such unanimity, Lincoln agreed to the plan, but repeated that McClellan must "leave such force at Manassas Junction as shall make it entirely certain that the enemy shall not reposess himself of that position and line of communication," and that, again, Washington must be safe.[14]

The Manassas requirement was an odd demand, "a measure not dictated by any sound military consideration."[15] And as for Washington's security, McClellan felt that this (as well as the safety of the Manassas line) was an obvious benefit of his advance along the Peninsula. First, when Johnston pulled back behind the Rappahannock, he destroyed the railroad bridges necessary for any new advance on the

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[13]McDowell to Stanton, Report of Council of Corps Commanders, 13 March 1862, Stanton Papers. McClellan intended at this point to leave 66,552 men at Washington, Baltimore and the Shenandoah Valley; new arrivals would bring this number to 77,401; or 57,091 present for duty, less Dix's command at Fort Monroe, but with the convalescent hospitals to draw upon. This, of the total Army of the Potomac present for duty of 203,213, based on the 1 March return. An estimate of the Washington garrison (made 21 October 1861 by Barnard and Barry) was 34,000. Thus from the beginning the General counted on 23,000 troops assigned to the Valley. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 163-64.

[14]Stanton to McClellan, 13 March, McClellan Papers.

[15]Swinton, 95.

Manassas line. If he should somehow manage to recross the river, Union cavalry patrols would give sufficient warning to dispose troops to repel him. Second, immediately upon learning of the Army of the Potomac's movement up the Peninsula, Johnston would have to withdraw any remaining forces from Northern Virginia in order to meet the assault. Finally, "surrounded as Washington was with numerous and strong fortifications well garrisoned, it was manifest that the enemy could not afford to detach from his main army a force sufficient to assail them."[16] Even war correspondent Frederick Edge, who was willing to believe almost any scurrilous tale about McClellan, dismissed the idea of the Army occupying Johnston's old Manassas forts, for "the chain of batteries round Washington is ample to defend the city,

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[16]McClellan, Report, 142-43. As it happens, there was a serious proposal by a Confederate general to take advantage of the removal of the bulk of McClellan's troops to attack Washington. On 14 April, Confederate President Jefferson Davis met with his new War Secretary, Johnston, and Generals G. W. Smith, James Longstreet and Robert E. Lee. Reporting on the Peninsula defense situation, Johnston said he felt the front would have to be abandoned. Smith recommended garrisoning Richmond and letting McClellan lay siege to the capital while the preponderance of Johnston's forces attacked Washington and Baltimore or Philadelphia and New York, with the cooperation of General Thomas J. Jackson's Valley army. Longstreet also proposed holding McClellan before Yorktown while the main army marched on Washington via the Shenandoah Valley. Eventually, however, Davis decided to face the Federals on the Peninsula. Douglas S. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 1:148-51.

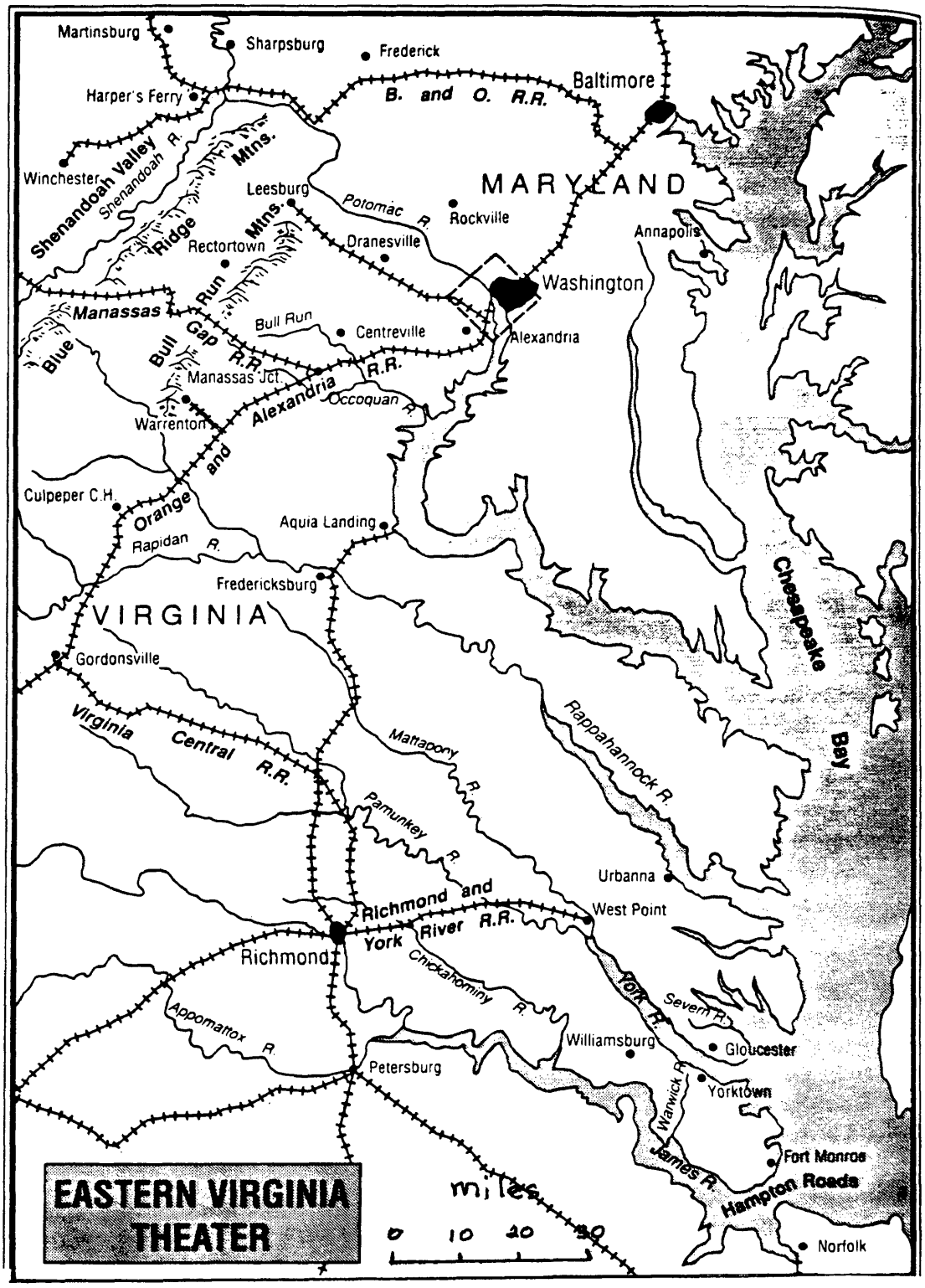

Figure 2. Eastern Virginia Theatre. From S.W. Sears, George B. McClellan, The Young Napoleon, 152.

and it is scarcely likely that the enemy will return, having once quitted."[17]

McClellan set about arranging for the defenses of Washington. On 16 March, his Adjutant General, Seth Williams, wrote Wadsworth about the number and disposition of the troops in the newly-created Military District of Washington (MDW). The geographical limits of MDW were the cities of Washington and Alexandria, the defense works south of the Potomac from Occoquan to Difficult Creek, and the post of Fort Washington. Banks was to command at Manassas Junction, but Wadsworth should nevertheless "exercise vigilance in your front, carefully guard the approaches in that quarter and maintain the duties of advanced guards," and also take care to protect flank approaches. All troops not necessary to police Washington and Georgetown or to garrison forts north of the Potomac should be moved south of the river. Wadsworth was instructed to post his main body of troops in the center of his front and to distribute "proper proportions at suitable distances" on either flank. He was to use patrols, urge troops to maintain the forts and arms and keep up training and discipline. He was also to look to the security of ferries, railroads and canals. And

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[17]Edge, 18.

he was responsible for all new troops--forming them into provisional brigades, and training and equipping them.[18]

The same day, McClellan ordered Banks to provide for the defense of Manassas. He was to entrench his force there and take positions at Centreville and Strasburg. He would repair railroad bridges and blockhouses between Washington and Strasburg, set out grand guards at Warrenton and in advance of his lines, and keep his cavalry well to the front. He was to develop good intelligence and cover the line of the Potomac and Washington.[19] Banks had been in the Shenandoah Valley to try to push out Confederate forces under Major General Thomas J. Jackson, but McClellan felt that the Valley was now secure enough that he could redeploy Banks' corps in Manassas in order to allay the President's uneasiness.[20]

Banks prepared to withdraw down the Valley toward Harpers Ferry to comply with his new orders. But on 23 March, as McClellan began embarking troops for Fort Monroe, Jackson attacked a Union force under James Shields at Kernstown. Though repulsed tactically, Jackson achieved a strategic victory, in that his assault forced Banks to

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[18]Williams to Wadsworth, 16 March 1862. Papers of Abraham Lincoln, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

[19]McClellan to Banks, 16 March 1862. McClellan, Civil War Correspondence, 212.

[20]Webb, 89-90.

cancel plans to evacuate the Valley. McClellan's "Manassas" force would now remain along the Shenandoah.

At the time, Kernstown seemed a fortunate opportunity to capture Jackson or drive him permanently from the Valley, securing the B & O Railroad and communications into Eastern Tennessee, where Lincoln was anxious to render support to the pocket of loyalists who resided there. It was also a second chance for Frémont to make his military mark.

As commander of the Mountain Department, Frémont was responsible for guarding the B & O and seizing the railroad between Richmond and Knoxville.[21] Stanton had opposed Frémont's appointment, seconded by Hitchcock, who described Frémont as "the willing idol of a party whose design is to pervert the constitutional power of the government to revolutionary purposes."[22] The Radicals wanted Frémont to make the kill in the Valley. The CCW conferred with Stanton, urging him to detach Louis Blenker's division from the Army of the Potomac and send it to the Mountain

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[21]Thomas to Fremont, 22 March 1862, OR 7, pt. 3:8.

[22]23 March 1862, Hitchcock, 440-41. The hostility of the War Secretary became so well known that Horace Greeley urged the President to intervene. The issue, he said, was not whether or not Frémont was a great general, but that "our loyal people, with scarcely an exception, are anxious that he should be permitted to show what he is." If Lincoln did not give Frémont full latitude, "it will generally be thought that he has been crippled, and the government will be blamed for whatever ill [?] fortune [?] may befall. Pray look to this." Greeley to Lincoln, 16 March, 1862, in Lincoln, 5:169n.

Department. Although antipathetic to Frémont, Stanton was willing to aid the Radicals, but with McClellan supported enthusiastically by the Democrats, Lincoln did not relish the consequences of depriving him of Blenker.[23] There were also rumors that the Radicals were using Lincoln to get McClellan. Bates warned the President that "extreme men in Congress were lying in wait against him," especially regarding McClellan.[24]

Hitchcock suggested that Lincoln send Frémont only enough troops to protect the B & O, using others to reinforce McClellan's right, which was open to attack by the Confederates "who, though not likely to take it, might be invited by its weakness to make some desperate attempt similar to one already made by Jackson upon Shields."[25]

However, the Radicals were implacable: Frémont must be reinforced. Stanton was eager to accommodate the ultras. Based, he noted, on McClellan's own figures, he recommended sending 19,500 troops to Frémont (8,500 under Blenker, 9,000 under Hooker, plus three cavalry regiments, four batteries of artillery and two pontoon trains). That would leave McClellan the force already at Fort Monroe, 80,000;

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[23]Trefousse, Radicals, 192, 196.

[24]15 March 1862, Bates, 240-41.

[25]Hitchcock to Lincoln, 30 March 1862, OR 12, pt. 1:229-30. Hitchcock did not specify the location of "the right", but probably was referring to Manassas.

McDowell's corps, 34,000; Richardson's Division, 8,000; and 5,500 cavalry volunteers--for a total of 127,500. There would remain at Washington 3,300 regular cavalry, 4,200 regular infantry, 12,000 volunteer infantry, 110 guns, and two pontoon trains. He listed about 8,000 troops in the Baltimore-Annapolis area, which could presumably be called upon.[26] With everything so clearly provided for, he concluded, Hooker and Blenker could easily be spared.

Lincoln, perhaps heeding Greeley's advice, finally agreed to send Blenker only, and informed McClellan of the detachment, assuring him that this division would be the last troops taken from the Peninsula operation. The President told McClellan, "If you could know the full pressure of the case," he would understand; McClellan later insisted that this pressure "was only a political one to swell Fremont's command."[27] The General remonstrated with the President and Secretary, but the best he could negotiate was Stanton's authorization to redeploy Blenker in the

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[26]Stanton to Lincoln, 30 March 1862, Stanton Papers. Stanton calculated 80,750 as already having arrived at Fort Monroe, with 67,000 yet to be transported (including the troops of Blenker and Hooker that he wanted transferred to Fremont). He counted Banks as part of the force left in Washington, although this may be based on the assumption that Banks would shortly be at Manassas instead of in the Valley. He appears to have entirely disregarded Sumner's Corps in his summary.

[27]Lincoln to McClellan, 31 March 1862, Lincoln, 5:175-76; McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 165.

Valley with Banks, as long as he was in a position to reinforce Frémont.[28]

Meanwhile, the defense network south of the Potomac was inspected, with the following report: Fort Barnard had eight guns; armament, ammunition, parapets slopes, and abatis were fine. Fort Richardson had nine guns; one mortar was unserviceable and one magazine leaked. Arms, ammunition, parapets, and abatis were in good condition. Fort Albany, with twelve guns, had thin parapets, but arms and ammunition were acceptable. Forts Craig and Tillinghurst had seven guns each, all in good order. These five fortresses were occupied by the 14th Massachusetts Volunteers. The troops were not yet fully drilled. Fort Cass's five guns, arms, ammunition and physical plant were all in good condition. It was garrisoned by a fully trained company (seventy-four men) of the Wisconsin Heavy Artillery. Fort Woodbury had five guns. Its slopes were caving in, and one magazine was flooded; everything else was fine. It was not garrisoned, however; only one sergeant and two sentinels were stationed there. Fort Dekalb likewise had nine guns, but no garrison; an ordnance sergeant and two sentinels were in residence. Its slopes were washing away, but arms, ammunition, and abatis were in good condition. Whatever troops garrisoned these two forts would require training.

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[28]Stanton to McClellan, 31 March 1862, OR, 5:62.

An artillery officer should coordinate it all, the inspectors recommended; and they concluded that the works were in good condition, considering the season.[29]

McClellan notified Banks--clearly still believing V Corps would soon take up positions around Manassas--that the Confederates had retreated across the Rappahannock, destroying the railroad bridge at Rappahannock Station. There was no trace of the enemy north of the river, and they had deserted Fredricksburg. He predicted that Johnston would not reinforce Jackson for any offensive in the Valley; the scene of action would soon shift to the Peninsula.[30]

With this, finally glad to be away from the sink of iniquity that he had found Washington to be, McClellan on 1 April embarked at Alexandria for Fort Monroe. In an effort to assure the President that Washington was indeed "entirely secure", one of his final acts before departing was to outline his provisions for the capital's defense: Dix had 6,800 at Baltimore, Annapolis and the Eastern Shore; Fort Delaware was "very well garrisoned" with 400 men. Washington forts were manned by 10,600, with "other disposable troops" under Wadsworth's command amounting to 11,400. There were 3,359 railroad guards in Maryland, who

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[29]N.B. Sweitzer to Colonel D.B. Sackett, Inspector General, 29 March 1862, OR 12, pt. 3:29-30.

[30]McClellan to Banks, 1 April 1862, in McClellan, Civil War Correspondence, 220.

should be relieved by dismounted cavalry and sent to Manassas (since they were "old regiments" and therefore fit for critical assignments). He also requested that some 3,500 troops being raised in Pennsylvania and any others from New York and other eastern states be sent to Manassas, along with 4,000 from Wadsworth's command. Warrenton's force totaled 7,780, with 12 pieces of artillery. If all this were done, there would be 18,639 men under Abercrombie's command at and around Manassas.

Blenker was to be moved from Warrenton to Strasburg (from the Rappahannock line to the Valley), remaining there "long enough to allow matters to assume a definite form in that region before proceeding to his ultimate destination" (the Mountain Department). Thus, troops in the Shenandoah Valley would amount to 35,467 men (Blenker's 10,028 men and 24 artillery pieces, V Corps's 19,687 men and forty-one guns, 3,652 disposable cavalry, and 2,100 railroad guards). Hooker, on the Lower Potomac, was to be relieved by a regiment of 850 men, who would join 500 cavalry to be left there.

Thus, the General concluded, he had deployed the following numbers for the defense of the capital, with 18,000 left "for the garrisons and the front of Washington":

At Warrenton:	7,780
At Manassas:	10,859
In Shenandoah Valley:	35,467
On Lower Potomac:	1,350
Total:	55,456[31]

This, he said, was entirely sufficient for the protection of the city, even if Blenker's division was subtracted, especially since the threat of Confederate attack was minimal: Johnston was behind the Rappahannock with no means of advance. Moreover, the city's defensive works were in good condition, manned by disciplined troops. And, most importantly, the Army of the Potomac's operations on the Peninsula would pull the remainder of the Rebel army even farther away from the capital. "Surrounded as Washington was with numerous and strong fortifications well garrisoned, it was manifest that the enemy could not afford to detach from his main army a force sufficient to assail them."[32]

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[31]McClellan to Thomas, 1 April 1862, OR, 11, pt. 3:59-60.

[32]McClellan, Report, 142-3.

CHAPTER SIX
BURY CAESAR

> People, and senators, be not affrighted;
> Fly not; stand still: ambition's debt is paid.
> III, i

Stanton's next action was passing strange, in light of the fact that he had already accepted McClellan's figures as comforting enough to justify sending 19,000 of the General's men to Frémont: scarcely had the General left the docks than the Secretary he demanded a report from Wadsworth on the state of the city's defense forces.[1] Wadsworth reported that he had under his command 15,335 infantry, 4,294 artillery and 848 cavalry (of which only six companies were mounted), for a total of 20,477. Less sick and those in arrest and confinement, there were but 19,022 men in Washington and Alexandria. Further, they were "new and imperfectly disciplined" troops, and there was no mounted light artillery. Moreover, from this force he was ordered to send away 4,000 men to Manassas, and four additional

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[1]Stanton's motives must be suspect in issuing this order, since the Inspector General had only days before received a report on the fortifications, made in the course of the Army's preparations for departure. See pp. 67-68.

regiments to various other commands. In short, "looking at the numerical strength and character of the force under my command, it is in my judgment entirely inadequate to and unfit for the important duty to which it is assigned."[2]

Immediately Stanton pounced on Hitchcock and Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas, ordering them to investigate whether McClellan had complied with the President's orders of 13 March to "leave Washington entirely secure."[3] The two generals noted McClellan's figures (55,456 total) and Wadsworth's (19,022 "imperfectly disciplined" men), factored into the equation the corps commanders' 13 March definition of a sufficient covering force (which Hitchcock and Thomas put at 25,000, with 30,000 to fully garrison the forts on the right bank of the Potomac), and concluded that McClellan had indeed not obeyed the President's order to protect the capital.[4] Hitchcock later testified that when he and Thomas

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[2]Wadsworth to Stanton, 2 April 1862, Stanton Papers. Later, before the CCW, Wadsworth testified that at this time he had only five regiments with any artillery training or experience. The left bank of the Potomac was stronger than the right, but he would have to strip the city's forts to garrison the ones south of the river. He estimated that he needed 25,000 "first class" troops for Washington's defense. When the Confederates at Gordonville and Culpeper left, he conceded that he would need fewer troops. Wadsworth consistently maintained that there was no Union army between the Confederates and Washington. JCCW 1:252-3.

[3]Stanton to Thomas and Hitchcock, 2 April 1862, OR, 11, pt. 3:57.

[4]Thomas and Hitchcock to Stanton, 2 April 1862, Stanton Papers. They noted that McClellan had included Banks' corps in his figures, but declined to express an opinion as to whether Valley troops should rightly be considered part of a

deducted Banks and Blenker, they could not find "25,000 men as a unit of force" for the forts at Washington and on the two banks of the Potomac, concluding, "If there was need of a military force for the safety of the city of Washington within its own limits that referred to in the report of General Wadsworth would seem to be entirely inadequate."[5] Although their investigation had taken less than a day, they were convinced that the capital was in danger. When this was reported to Lincoln (as fast as Stanton could manage), "he was manifestly under great anxiety."[6] The President thereupon instructed the War Secretary to hold back one corps from McClellan--either McDowell's or Sumner's--for the protection of the city.[7]

Stanton ordered McDowell detached and informed McClellan that this had been done because the President deemed the defenses of Washington inadequate.[8] McDowell deployed his troops around Manassas, Warrenton, and Centreville.[9] On 5 April, I and V Corps were detached

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defense force for Washington.

[5]Thomas and Hitchcock to Stanton, 2 April 1862, Ibid.

[6]Hitchcock's testimony before McDowell inquiry, 16 January 1863, OR, 12, pt. 1:220.

[7]Lincoln to Stanton, 3 April 1862, Stanton Papers.

[8]Thomas to McClellan, 4 April 1862, OR 12, pt. 3:66.

[9]McDowell to Colonel Edmond Schriver (Chief of Staff), 3 April 1862, Ibid., 39-40.

completely from the Army of the Potomac and made respectively the Armies of the Rappahannock and Shenandoah.[10] Stanton directed McDowell that Washington was "especially under your protection" and that he was not to move his troops out of position for the defense of the city.[11]

Meanwhile, Major General John E. Wool's command at Fort Monroe was removed from McClellan's control, reducing his force by another 10,000.[12] Thus, at a time when unified military coordination was vital, McClellan was relieved of command of not only other forces but also of all Virginia armies except the three corps he had with him. Now there were four commanders in the theatre between the Alleghenies and the Atlantic. Banks, Frémont, and McDowell, as well as various independent commands, received orders from Lincoln and other civilians, Thomas or Hitchcock.[13] McClellan was quick to note that the creation of these two new departments deprived him of control of his supply depots at Washington, his base of operations at Point Comfort and command of the

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[10]Thomas to McClellan, 5 April 1862. McClellan Papers.

[11]Stanton to McDowell, 11 April 1862, OR 12, pt. 3:66.

[12]Thomas to McClellan, 3 April 1862, McClellan, Report, 156.

[13]Charles A. Whittier, "Comments on the Peninsular Campaign of General McClellan," paper read before the Military Historical Society of Massachussets, 13 November 1876, in MHSM 1:233-34. Whittier observes that Halleck was unsuited by nature and habits to coordinate the sort of effort necessary, and Thomas and Hitchcock were simply without talent.

theatre. He also took it to mean that he was relieved of responsibility for the defense of Washington, but he nonetheless protested vehemently against the disruption of his command and his campaign.[14] Since making his plans for the Peninsula campaign, he had lost 50,000 men; he now would have only 85,000 when all arrived. At least, he begged, send I Corps to take Gloucester and enable rapid movement to West Point.[15]

Lincoln responded by citing the numbers Wadsworth had given him, remonstrating that ". . . less than twenty thousand unorganized men, without a single field battery, were all you designed to be left for the defense of Washington and Manassas Junction," part of which was to be moved to the Lower Potomac. It would have been adequate, Lincoln said, if Banks were at Manassas, but McClellan disturbed that plan without substituting any other force for that area, leaving the line from Richmond to Washington "entirely open, except [for] what resistance could be presented by less than twenty thousand unorganized troops." With Banks in the Shenandoah Valley instead of at Manassas, the Confederates would be tempted "to turn back from the Rappahannock and sack Washington." Therefore, McClellan had

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[14]McClellan to Lincoln, 6 April 1862, Lincoln Papers; McClellan, "The Peninsular Campaign," in Battles and Leaders, 2:170.

[15]McClellan to Stanton, 7 April 1862, McClellan, Civil War Correspondence, 232.

patently neglected the President's repeated orders to leave Washington secure, and Lincoln had acted appropriately by withholding McDowell.[16]

Another blow to the campaign was General Order No. 33, which closed recruiting depots for volunteers and halted all recruitment.[17] There would be no new troops to sustain the Army of the Potomac on its campaign.

There was also the loss of the Navy. McClellan had emphasized to Stanton the "absolute necessity" of swift movement to West Point, whence he expected to take Richmond. The batteries at Yorktown would have to be dealt with, either besieging the town or through a combined operation against it with a strong flanking corps under cover of the Navy. A siege would slow down the entire campaign;

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[16]Lincoln to McClellan, 7 April 1862, Lincoln Papers. The President warned McClellan that he was making political enemies with his attempts to reorganize his army to the benefit of his favorite subordinates. Lincoln himself has had to suffer political slanders; McClellan must learn to do the same.

[17]McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 151. McClellan took this as a personal attack on himself, but barely two weeks before Wadsworth had reported that so many troops had arrived in Washington that he believed "the force now here amply sufficient for the protection of the capital." He begged that the Secretary send him no more troops, at least until he could arrange for sanitation requirements. Wadsworth to Stanton, 21 March 1862, OR 12, pt. 3:7.

therefore he needed both McDowell's corps (which was to perform the flanking maneuver) and the Navy.[18]

Toward that end, McClellan and his subordinates had negotiated with Assistant Navy Secretary Gustavus V. Fox for support in the action.[19] On 17 March, McDowell informed his chief that Fox "promises all the power of the Department shall be at our disposal" and said that Louis M. Goldsborough, Flag Officer commanding the blockade force in the Lower Chesapeake, would be conferring with one of his subordinates.[20] But three days later, McDowell reported that "the ability of the Navy to do their part" was now in question.[21]

Concerning Yorktown, Fox later insisted that "the Navy Department never was consulted at all, to my knowledge, in regard to any thing connected with the matter." Goldsbor-

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[18]McClellan to Stanton, 19 March 1862, OR 5:57-58. The Secretary responded that Lincoln would talk with the General on this issue. Stanton to McClellan, 19 March 1862, Ibid., 11, pt. 3:18. There appears to be no evidence, however, that such a conference ever took place.

[19]Reed blames these attempts to get naval cooperation for the delay in implementing the Peninsula campaign, and for McClellan's reliance on I Corps' amphibious capability." Reed, 130.

[20]McDowell to McClellan, 17 March 1862, OR 11, pt. 3:9. Lt.-Col. Daniel P. Woodbury of the engineers included in his report on the Peninsular conditions a statement that Goldsborough "expressed his desire to co-operate in every way." Woodbury to McClellan, 19 March 1862, Ibid., 22-24.

[21]McDowell to McClellan, 20 March 1862, Ibid., 24-25.

ough had been directed to cooperate as much as possible, he conceded, but no plan was ever submitted to the Navy from the War Department for such a combined operation; in fact, it was not practicable for his gunships to attack the Yorktown batteries, which were placed too high. Moreover, he concluded, "no complaint was ever made to the Navy Department" regarding the situation.[22]

It seems clear that McClellan, with his penchant for seeing things as he wanted them to be, was simply making the assumption that, because he wanted the Navy to reduce the

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[22]John C. Palfrey, "The Siege of Yorktown," paper read before the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts 14 January 1878, in MHSM 1:43-44. Reed posits that there was a conspiracy directed against McClellan, claiming that there are only two documents extant of a correspondence "reflecting the abundant negotiations on the subject" of Navy cooperation in the Peninsula Campaign (one of 14 March 1862 from Welles to Stanton, denying McClellan's request for a squadron at Port Royal; and one of 24 March from Fox to Goldsborough leaving it up to the latter if or how to cooperate with McClellan)--all the rest were removed to protect the guilty. Reed, 126. This seems a bit farfetched, particularly in light of the fact that no one (Reed included) has ever accused the Navy of being actively anti-McClellan. Even as she suggests a plot, Reed notes that there is nothing in OR, or the papers of Fox, Welles or McCellan, to indicate that direct support of the Yorktown assault was ever promised. It is hard to credit McClellan with destroying or concealing any real or imagined evidence that he was wronged in this matter. And finally, given Welles's and Stanton's mutual antipathy, it is unlikely that the Navy Secretary would engage in such shenanigans in a cause that would play into the War Secretary's hands.

Yorktown and Gloucester Point batteries, the Navy would do so.[23] The loss of McDowell is perhaps more serious.

McClellan believed he had left sufficient troops in Northern Virginia adequately to defend Washington. Stanton had apparently felt that the city was so secure that 19,000 troops could be sent to Fremont. And even Hitchcock had given tacit approval when McClellan sent him figures on the arrangements for the city's defense, as he declined to offer any suggestions, since McClellan was more familiar with the situation.[24]

This, of course, was before Jackson nipped Banks's heels at Kernstown. McClellan had to delay the transfer of V Corps to Manassas in hopes of stopping Jackson. And Lincoln himself believed this was an splendid opportunity to clear the Confederates from the Valley--he continually pressed Banks, Frémont, and (eventually) McDowell to catch Jackson in some sort of pincer maneuver. But as time went on, and Jackson remained at liberty, things seem to have altered: the longer he escaped capture or defeat, the more menacing he appeared.

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[23]McClellan knew before leaving Washington that naval support in the reduction of the Yorktown batteries was unlikely, as evidenced by his instructions to General William F. Barry, his Chief of Artillery, to come equipped for besieging the town's works. McClellan to Barry, 22 March 1862, McClellan Papers.

[24]OR, 5:63.

In making provision for the defense of Washington, McClellan did not believe it was necessary to occupy Manassas in force. The enemy had retreated across the Rappahannock, destroying the only bridge that enabled him to recross. Hitchcock and Thomas agreed: "In regard to occupying Manassas Junction, as the enemy have destroyed the railroads leading to it it may be fair to assume that they have no intention of returning for the reoccupation of their late position, and therefore no very large force would be necessary to hold that position."[25] Even Wadsworth thought it "very improbable that the enemy will assail us at this point."[26] Yet this is where McDowell situated his corps-cum-army, without comment from Lincoln, Stanton or the Washington generals. Stanton in fact soon had intelligence confirming that the Confederates had left the Rappahannock for Yorktown; but he made no changes in McDowell's disposition.[27]

McClellan also had counted Banks's corps in the Shenandoah Valley as a substantial and legitimate part of the defense of Washington. Here there was controversy.

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[25]Thomas and Hitchcock to Stanton, 2 April 1862, OR 11, pt. 3:61.

[26]Wadsworth to Stanton, 2 April 1862, Stanton Papers. The MDW commander qualified this statement by noting "this belief is based upon the hope that they [the enemy] may be promptly engaged elsewhere, and may not learn the number and character of the force left here." Ibid.

[27]Stanton to Banks, 13 April 1862, OR 11, pt. 3:94.

McDowell stated that the 13 March council of corps commanders did not think Valley troops should be included in the capital defense forces, and McDowell himself did not consider Valley troops "properly applicable" to the city's defense.[28] Hitchcock believed that the troops at Warrenton and Manassas were a legitimate part of the defense of Washington; but the Valley was really a separate front, and therefore Banks should not have been included because he was actually needed in that theatre. Moreover, since Blenker was removed from the Army of the Potomac, he should not have been counted among the defense forces at all.[29]

McClellan of course saw it differently. Again and again, he insisted that he left plenty of high quality troops well-placed for the city's defense, but administration actions kept back 134,000 men, leaving him but 85,000 to carry on a campaign that required from 110,000 to 140,000, "according to circumstances."[30]

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[28]McDowell testimony at McDowell Inquiry, 12 December 1862, OR 12, pt. 1:104.

[29]Hitchcock before McDowell inquiry, 16 January 1863, OR, 12, pt. 1:220. Hitchcock felt, at the time, that Blenker ought not to have been sent to Fremont. He said so to Stanton, who agreed and sent the General to Lincoln to argue the case--unsuccessfully.

[30]McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 241; McClellan to Stanton, 3 February 1862, Gorham, 376-77. In refuting McClellan's claims to have only 85,000 troops with him, Gorham goes on to point out that, according to McClellan's own statements, by 5 April, Assistant Secretary of War John Tucker reported having transported 121,500 men to Fort Monroe. Ibid.

Regarding the withholding of I Corps, on 3 April, McDowell discussed it with one of his division commanders, who reported to McClellan.

> McDowell told me that it was intended as a blow at you. That Stanton had said that you intended to work by strategy and not by fighting; that all of the opponents of the policy of the administration centred around you--in other words, that you had political aspirations.[31]

McDowell urged Stanton not to withhold troops from McClellan because if the General did have political ambitions, this blow would only serve them; Stanton was unmoved.[32]

This rift between Stanton and McClellan became a public issue, as Democratic newspapers proclaimed that a Radical plot to destroy McClellan's political chances was endangering the Army of the Potomac.

> The radicals have gained, by some means or other, a very dangerous influence over the War Department, and an end cannot be put [to] it a moment too soon. . . . They want to have the war prolonged. . . . They know the [speedy] restoration of the Union would be the death knell of their faction. . . ."[33]

Stanton was warned that there was "much feeling" regarding his "depriving" McClellan of I Corps, but he

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[31]Franklin to McClellan, 7 April 1862, in McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, 151.

[32]William B. Franklin, "The First Great Crime of the War," in The Annals of the War Written by Leading Participants North and South, ed. Alexander K. McClure (Philadelphia: Times Publishing Co., 1879), 81.

[33]James G. Bennett, signed editorial in New York Herald, 4 April 1862, in Drozdowski, 789.

remained steadfast.[34] In fact, he was even then consulting with Chase and Admiral John A. Dalgren to combine Frémont's and Banks's forces under McDowell and send them south to take Richmond while McClellan wallowed on the Peninsula. At a military council on 9 April, the President rejected that plan because he knew Frémont would never serve under McDowell.[35]

Thus in a few days had McClellan's brilliant campaign plan been destroyed. To his mind the withholding of I Corps was the shattering blow.

> It frustrated all my plans for impending operations. It fell when I was too deeply committed to withdraw. It left me incapable of continuing operations that had been begun. It compelled the adoption of another, a different, and a less effective plan of campaign. It made rapid and brilliant operations impossible. It was a fatal error.[36]

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[34]C.C. Fulton to Stanton, 9 April 1862, Stanton Papers. This correspondent laid the blame on machinations by McDowell, concluding that "if we should be defeated through trickery of McDowell, a terrible retribution will rest somewhere."

[35]Drozdowski, 760.

[36]McClellan, Report, 553.

CHAPTER SEVEN
SUCH SLIPPERY GROUND

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
III, i

McClellan never wavered from his claim that the loss of I Corps sounded the death knell for the Peninsula campaign and that its detachment had no military basis. Stanton conspired with the Radicals to undermine all his plans to ensure his defeat and all talk of the security of the capital was merely a smokescreen for the plot to ruin the victory that rightly belonged to him and his Army.

The General believed that he had indeed left Washington safe from attack. Throughout the Peninsula campaign, he insisted, Northern Virginia was "completely in our possession, and the vicinity of Washington free from the presence of the enemy." The capital, he said, was never threatened until the Confederates learned of the Army of the Potomac's evacuation from the Peninsula.[1] Therefore, the

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[1]McClellan, Report, 124. As it happens, the Confederate army in Virginia was indeed concentrated on the Peninsula (except, of course for Jackson in the Valley). But at the same time, McClellan always contended that Johnston evacuated Manassas and Centreville only upon

withholding of I Corps was not--could not--be predicated on military considerations; it had to be a political decision, made with the specific intent of ruining McClellan.

This is certainly the way the Democratic press saw the case. Moreover, there is evidence that Stanton was doing his best to undermine the General: offering command of the Army of the Potomac to Hitchcock, pushing for reinforcements for Fremont, maneuvering for the corps reorganization, even scandalmongering.[2]

Stanton's duplicity notwithstanding, the character of the times must be taken into consideration when examining decisions that were made regarding the conduct of the war. Rabid as McClellan's supporters in the press were, there was equal fervor on the Radical side. Those who believed in the conspiracy of the Slave Power considered McClellan and his

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learning of the Union plans for an advance along the Peninsula.

[2]On 2 April, Senator Orville H. Browning met with Stanton and Lincoln. The Secretary repeated a rumor that McClellan had been inducted by Jefferson Davis into the Knights of the Golden Circle only two years previously. Word was that Davis was McClellan's mentor and still had power and influence over the Union General. Therefore, McClellan would never really try to defeat the South. Stanton added that "he didn't believe these imputations of disloyalty, but they were believed extensively and did us injury," Browning noted. Stanton pursued Browning, insisting that McClellan was not in earnest, and should have been removed long since. He urged Browning to propose to the President the promotion of one Colonel N.B. Buford to Major General and command of the Army of the Potomac--Stanton would second the nomination. Even McDowell was better than McClellan, Stanton concluded. 2 April 1862, Browning, 1:538-39.

ilk the personification of that evil which was sapping the vigor of the Union cause. Jane Grey Swisshelm, a Minnesota abolitionist, exemplifies this viewpoint. McClellan, she wrote, purposely sent Baker to Ball's Bluff "to be disposed of" and took the Army of the Potomac to the Peninsula's swamps "to be decimated by disease and by placing detached corps on positions to be attacked by overwhelming numbers of the enemy." In fact, not to put too fine a point upon it, McClellan was allied with Satan.[3]

The Radicals despised and feared McClellan as much for his West Point background as his Democratic political leanings. They continually pressured Lincoln to remove McClellan and replace him with a general with political bona fides. They were afraid that the war would be settled without a southern defeat and the destruction of slavery, that it would end before they had firmly grasped the reins of power.[4] Yet their choice--Frémont--was not having much success, either. The Pathfinder could not seem to locate a road to Jackson that would decisively end the Valley campaign, and his demands for reinforcements matched

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[3]11 April 1863, Jane G. Swisshelm, Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1858-1865, ed. Arthur J. Larsen (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society, 1934; reprint, Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1976), 213-216. This date is not in error: long after McClellan had been removed from command (and before he became a presidential candidate), the Radicals continued to fulminate against him.

[4]Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals, 10-26 passim.

McClellan's throughout the spring of 1862. Eventually, he would resign his appointment rather than serve under John Pope (yet another Radical torchbearer).

Without question, Jackson played a significant role in this drama. His actions in the Shenandoah Valley upset McClellan's plans for the defense of Washington and caused Lincoln mounting anxiety. Although early on Banks knew that the Confederate forces were quite small,[5] the fact that three different armies could not stop Jackson from going where he would must have driven the President crazy. He withheld first Blenker in hopes of Frémont ridding the Valley of Jackson, and then McDowell to reinforce the capital's security. The city would not be safe while Jackson was free. By late May, Lincoln was himself devising strategy and tactics, trying to coordinate Banks, McDowell and Fremont into springing a trap on Jackson. And it was his choice to withhold a corps from McClellan's field force to protect Washington.

This decision was based on a rather astonishing paper chase: McClellan insisted that he left more than 70,000 troops for the defense of the city; Wadsworth et al. answered that there were only 19,000. This is a serious discrepancy, yet historians do not seem to have explored it. They accept the figures of either one side or the other and

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[5]Banks to Thomas, 6 April 1862, OR 12, pt. 3:48-50.

go on from there. There are several curious mysteries involved in these numeric differences that had such serious consequences, curiosities that lend support to the idea that the withholding of McDowell's corps was not based in military necessity.

For one thing, there was a rather indecent haste attached to the "investigations" by Wadsworth, Thomas and Hitchcock: both reports were made 2 April, presumably within hours of Stanton's queries, and, significantly, the day after McClellan departed for Old Point Comfort--while he was incommunicado.[6] It seems unlikely indeed that this triumvirate had access to any relevant documents unavailable to McClellan, and they certainly could not have uncovered any such new figures in the brief time they devoted to their inquiries.

Further, in all the documents relating to the numbers of troops defending Washington, Wadsworth, Thomas and Hitchcock only mentioned forces in the city itself (the 19,000 men). The latter two did go so far as to note that Manassas was probably a moot point and sniffed that the value of forces in the Shenandoah Valley was not really their concern.[7] Yet the council of corps commanders had considered a covering force integral to the city's defense

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[6]OR, 11, pt. 3:57-62.

[7]Ibid., 61.

network, and in McClellan's summary the Military District of Washington was only part of that system (of 70,000 men). Wadsworth's figures for the troops under his command were not so very different from McClellan's, but the Commanding General emphasized a "covering force", which Stanton's triumvirate seems to have ignored completely.[8]

Checking the monthly troop returns to discover what exactly the situation was does not help much to resolve the discrepancy. They were in fact not officially compiled and submitted until four months later.[9] There is no indication that they were ultimately "fixed," but they are not necessarily indisputable evidence of what McClellan and his opponents saw and relied upon in those crucial days in

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[8]Another oddity is the fact that McClellan never pursued this question. What he did do was remonstrate with both Lincoln and Stanton about the detachment of I Corps--but only from the viewpoint of his campaign plans being ruined. He never addressed the issue of his provisions for Washington's security, leading to speculation that he was not ready to live and die by the accuracy of his numbers.

[9]See Appendix. The return from which these figures were drawn was for the entire Army of the Potomac. Monthly returns for individual units (up to the divisonal level), which might help get at the actual counts, are not filed in the same manner as those for armies. They are apparently kept amongst the daily troop musters, which are stored higgledy-piggledy in mismarked cartons in the National Archives, unsorted and seemingly undisturbed since their dumping there sometime in the last century. Trying to find the relevant documents and make sense of them would be heartbreaking work, if not an impossibility.

April.[10] The return's figures for the Military District of Washington (19,920 enlisted present for duty; 22,410 aggregate present and absent) support McClellan's 1 April count; plus another 1,459 in the Military District of Alexandria (part of Wadsworth's command as of 17 March). Wadsworth's total of 20,477, with 19,022 present for duty is certainly close.[11] But he did not mention any of the other troops included in McClellan's 1 April disposition, nor listed in the March return for the Army of the Potomac. He did not specify whether he had included troops from the MDA, but it seems unlikely. Nor did he apparently mention the unattached units (on the March return amounting to some 8,000 troops), which were left in and about the capital and later transferred to the MDW command. He likewise excluded the 13,430 men (as on March's return) under Major General John A. Dix in Maryland (6,988 by McClellan's 1 April estimate). And he disregarded the 3,317 railway guards (3,359 in McClellan's), which McClellan wanted moved forward to Manassas--albeit with 4,000 of Wadsworth's troops.

Interestingly, the March return's total for the troops available for the defense of Washington, Maryland, the Valley and Northern Virginia was in excess of 91,000, more

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[10]The official returns do reflect minor discrepancies from the figures published as extracts in the OR. But these differences are tiny indeed.

[11]Wadsworth to Stanton, 2 April 1862, Stanton Papers.

even than McClellan's figures, which his detractors claimed were outrageously inflated, if not downright fabrications. Subtracting Blenker, Banks, and Dix, there were still nearly 32,000 troops in and immediately around Washington--and designed to be left there for its protection.[12]

It is true that Banks had not been able to take up position around Manassas, and Lincoln had made his concern for security there abundantly plain. But his force was serving its proper function by countering the threat in the Valley. If V Corps had been at Manassas, covering the Rappahannock, it would be expected to parry any attempt by Jackson to menace Washington. As it was, he was keeping the Confederates occupied a good distance from the capital.

McClellan counted these troops in the Shenandoah Valley as a legitimate part of the capital's defense network. Thomas's and Hitchcock's refusal to comment on the utility of Valley forces was an indication that they disagreed. V Corps was among the many units that went unmentioned in Wadsworth's report. And Lincoln clearly believed that if the men in the Shenandoah should be counted at all, they must be considered secondary to those at Manassas and

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[12]These figures, of course, represent the aggregate present and absent (everyone who was on the rolls as assigned to a unit). Present for duty figures would be smaller by about ten to twenty percent.

Warrenton.[13] This point has been debated by military men and historians--with no resolution. But, again, Banks was doing at least as good a job in the Valley as he could have around Manassas (given his inate ineptitude), so it would seem that McClellan was correct.

And if the retention of I Corps was for solely military reasons--for the defense of Washington and the destruction of Jackson--its disposition around Manassas was an odd deployment. The defensive works around Washington were in good order and were manned two years later with far fewer troops than were left in the city in the spring of 1862.[14] By all accounts, there was a consensus that this was the least likely approach for any Confederate attack--there was no means for the enemy to cross the river in force. All the

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[13]Lincoln to McClellan, 7 April 1862, Lincoln Papers. Justifying the retention of I Corps, the President stated that McClellan's provisions for the safety of Washington would have been adequate with Banks at Manassas, but when McClellan "disturbed" that deployment (keeping V Corps in the Valley, and not putting a comparable force along the Virginia line), he had endangered the capital. Clearly, Banks at Manassas meant security; Banks in the Valley meant peril. The Department of the Shenandoah had been detached from McClellan's command as of 3 April. Lincoln himself could have moved Banks to Manassas instead of withholding McDowell, had he really deemed this the best disposition for the security of Washington.

[14]Although it must be noted that in 1864 Lincoln had more confidence in General Ulysses S. Grant's strategy and his ability to cover Washington. Moreover, by then, it was clear that the European powers were not going to support the Confederacy, so there was not as much riding on any attack on the capital. Confederate General Jubal A. Early's July near miss was more in the way of counting coup than a strategic threat to the city.

action was then taking place in the Valley and soon on the Peninsula. Yet McDowell was parked at Manassas and told that his special charge was the protection of Washington, and he would "make no movement throwing your force out of position for the discharge of this primary duty."[15] Then he was given orders to advance by land to join with McClellan north of Richmond; then to work with Banks and Fremont to catch Jackson.[16] In the end, his corps was exhausted by the marches across Northern Virginia, Jackson slipped through the three Yankee armies, and McClellan was deprived of his flanking column. Nearly 40,000 troops were, in effect, completely wasted.

McClellan spent a great deal of time remonstrating with Stanton and the President over the loss of I Corps. He complained that this action was to blame for the failure of the Peninsular Campaign, from beginning (the need to lay siege to Yorktown instead of flanking it) to end (dividing his Army across the Chickahominy River, leaving it to be attacked piecemeal).[17] These charges have been debated for

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[15]Stanton to McDowell, 15 April 1862, OR 12 pt. 3:66.

[16]Stanton to McDowell, 17 May 1862, Ibid., 11, 1:28; Stanton to McDowell, 24 May 1862, Ibid., 12, 1:28; Lincoln to McDowell, 24 May 1862, Lincoln, 5:232-3.

[17]His claim that sending I Corps overland caused him to extend his own men across the Chickahominy in May does not hold up well: as soon as the James River was cleared by the destruction of the Virginia and the Norfolk Navy Yard--before McDowell's order to advance--McClellan made no move to change his base of operation to the James River; and in fact never mentioned this possibility until long after the

more than 128 years, and it seems pointless to throw more wood on that fire.

The issue here is whether the decision to withhold I Corps was made for purely military reasons. That would appear to be out of the question. McClellan had left a force for the defense of the Washington area that should have been adequate. Banks was doing his job (more or less), the defense works around the city were in good condition, and there were no Confederates to speak of north of the Rappahannock or east of the Blue Ridge. Retaining McDowell's entire corps and deploying it around Manassas seems both excessive and redundant.

It is true that McClellan had not complied with presidential orders: while his provisions for the defense of Washington may have been adequate, they did not meet the specifications laid down by his 13 March council of corps commanders.[18] This left him open to Stanton's very carefully worded charge: "[R]eport to me whether the

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campaign had ended. Both options (moving to the James or staying with the original West Point plan) are noted in McClellan's Own Story, 342-43. But three pages later, he lays blame for the loss of the entire campaign on McDowell's orders to join him overland. Ibid., 346. Yet, he later testified that he would have been entirely glad to have McDowell's corps no matter how it arrived. McClellan before McDowell inquiry, 10 December 1862, OR 12, pt. 1:95.

[18]I.e., the covering force (excluding the Federals in the Valley, which were clearly of no account to the triumvirate) did not amount to the 25,000 to 40,000 men recommended.

President's order and instructions have been complied with in respect to the forces to be left for the defense of Washington and its security and at Manassas."[19]

If this action was not taken for military reasons, then, what could be the motivation? These would have to be both psychological and political. There was a climate of anxiety in Washington, which had been perceived as being in danger to greater or lesser degrees since the Secession Winter of 1860-61. An attack on the city--successful or not--could tip the international scales in favor of the Confederacy. The Radicals had their own ideological agenda, which they believed took priority over purely military objectives. And McClellan scorned to inform his civilian superiors even as he declined to consult his subordinates. Lincoln was trying to balance all these opposing interests while still maintaining a government. He made mistakes.

One element in those errors was his loss of confidence in McClellan, for which the General has himself largely to blame. Lincoln's concerns for the security of the city--regardless of their basis in military reality--were made clear repeatedly in presidential inquiries and orders. McClellan in his arrogance ignored them, refusing to explain his actions or plans to the President, and he paid the consequences. If I Corps was withheld for non-military

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[19]Stanton to Thomas and Hitchcock, 2 April 1862, OR 11, pt. 3:57.

reasons--to reinforce the sense of security (if not the actual safety) for the Federal capital--this is not to say that psychological considerations are invalid when making military decisions.

Another factor, of course, was politics. Republicans were taking over the reins of power, with all the turmoil that accompanies a change of government. That this was going on during a civil war exacerbated the viciousness of that process. In particular there was the fanatical antagonism displayed by the Radicals, in which Stanton clearly took active part. If not forming an actual cabal, these men certainly found it to their mutual advantage to work together to undermine McClellan: the Jacobins to restructure the prosecution of the war along their ideological lines and Stanton to gather the reins of power. Wade and his ilk had laid the groundwork by pushing for Fremont's new command and reinforcements and for the reorganization of the Army of the Potomac. But it was the War Secretary who waited until McClellan was out of the city and away from a telegraph to instigate the reports of Wadsworth et al., who played on Lincoln's fears, and who directed the deployment of McDowell. There would be no West Point/Democratic Caesar to triumph if Stanton and the Radicals had any say in the matter. If they had to risk a short-term loss on the Peninsula in order to entrench their

individual and collective power, well, that was the price to be paid.

Thus the General was undermined: stripped of supreme command, refused naval support, removed from control of his supply depots, cut of from new recruits, and, finally, denied his flanking corps. His ordeal, unlike Caesar's, would be dragged out for six months before he would ultimately be removed from command of his beloved Army. But the fatal blow, he was always convinced, was the withholding of McDowell's corps. For him, it was the "most unkindest cut of all."

APPENDIX
TROOPS AVAILABLE FOR THE DEFENSE OF WASHINGTON[1]

Unit	Location	Number
Blenker Division	Warrenton Junction	10,584
Banks Corps	Woodstock	32,625
Military District of Washington[2]	Washington	22,410
Military District of Alexandria[3]	Alexandria	1,459
Dix's Division[4]	Maryland	13,430
Railway Brigade[5]	Washington	3,317

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[1]Abstracted from Return for March, 1862, of Army of the Potomac. Signed by George B. McClellan, Major General, Commanding, 4 August 1862, Harrison's Landing, Virginia. National Archives, RG 94, Returns of the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the Rappahannock.

[2]Command instituted 15 March 1862, per General Order No. 25, War Department.

[3]Command instituted 17 March 1862, per Special Order No. 83, Army of the Potomac.

[4]Transferred to Middle Department, 22 March 1862.

[5]Transferred to Middle Department, 22 March, 1862.

Unattached Units

Volunteer Artillery[6]	Washington	134
Fort Washington[7]		198
Field Works & Artillery	North of Potomac	4,371
Co. B, 26th Penn. Volunteers[8]	Washington	93
Field Works & Artillery[9]	South of Potomac	1,511
TOTAL:		90,132

[6]Transferred to Military District of Washington.

[7]Transferred to Military District of Washington.

[8]Transferred to J.S. Wadsworth, etc.

[9]Transferred to J.S. Wadsworth, etc.

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